

“It is an affront to treat falsehood with complacence.” Thomas Paine

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LEFT-WING SUPPORT GROUP

By: Malcolm A. Kline

On the scene with thousands of English professors at their annual Modern Language Association conference in Chicago.

It's odd watching a group of left-wing academics buck up each other's spirits after they've encountered the cold, cruel world outside academe. Such a gathering was on display at the Modern Language Association's annual meeting in Chicago this month whenever the Radical Caucus of the MLA met.

"The failure of communism did not result from Lenin, Stalin and Mao," Grover C. Furr of Montclair State University told the group. "These were some of the greatest men in the world."

"Socialism preserved the contradictions of capitalism, such as differentiations in pay. We should abandon the term 'socialism.' Marx and Engels did not write *The Socialist Manifesto*."

Furr also says of the Soviet massacre of Polish officers in the Katyn Forrest that "It turns out it didn't happen." Actually, we now have a copy of Soviet premier Joseph Stalin's signature authorizing the assassination.

On the Literature and Life After Capitalism panel with Furr were fellow Radical Caucus members:

- Melissa Macero of the University of Massachusetts, who thinks that Zombies as a great way to characterize "the one percent;"
- John Maerhofer of Roger Williams University who saw "a symbiotic relationship between capitalism and globalism, racism and sexism;"
- Ben V. Olquin of the University of Texas who lamented that Latino and Latina science-fiction has a "reactionary tendency" with a "political critique that devolves into libertarian paradigm;" and
- Joe Ramsey of the University of Massachusetts at Lowell, who was particularly proud that an article he wrote for the *Journal in Socialism and Democracy* was edited by Mumia Abu-Jamal, the convicted Philadelphia cop killer.

Note that though these folks may represent a fringe group within a fringe group, all have academic berths, as did the speakers at the other Radical Caucus sessions at the MLA. Although they only numbered four out of 810, these panels nevertheless featured 10 pedagogues from about as many universities including:

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Director's Corner

By Malcolm A. Kline, Executive Director of AIA



February 2014

Dear Reader,

Happy Valentine's Day!

As you can see, we covered the Modern Language Association's annual meeting in Chicago and share some of our observations of same herein. We make this trek every year because just about every English department is represented at the MLA. In more than 800 panels featuring at least three times that number of pedagogues, professors preview their classes and graduate assistants present their theses in what amounts to job interviews. In fact, many professors are hired here.

Thus, it gives us a pretty good insight into the humanities, but the view itself is not very lovely. "Through its history, the Modern Language Association has thus followed the fate of American higher education," Jeffrey J. Williams wrote in *The Chronicle Review*. "With the squeeze on jobs, conventions over the past four years have started to shrink from their average of more than 10,000 registrants, now mustering about 7,500."

"That is a problem, since it drains some of the opportunities for contact that are essential for intellectual life. For now, MLA remains a prime stage for literary critics. Let's hope we can sustain it." Lloyd is an English professor at Carnegie Mellon.

Actually, you can see the transformation of the MLA itself in its very name: They obviously take the "modern" and "association" parts very seriously but the "language" anchor has virtually been pulled over the portside. At a delegate assembly meeting at the MLA confab in Chicago, I heard a complaint from the linguistics division that there were virtually no panels on that subject at the convention. Indeed, you can only find 19 panels on linguistics in the program, out of 810.

More than likely, you are apt to see panels on "Genealogies of Anticolonialism," "Literary Sociologies of Race and Ethnicity," and "Cognitive Approaches to Film." Those publications that cover the MLA usually stop at a recital of panel and presentation titles. We actually attend the meetings and report on them.

We do so in order to give you the most in-depth reporting we can on accuracy in academia.

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All the best,

Mal Kline,
Executive Director



- Richard M. Ohmann, Wesleyan University, “Different from You and Me;”

- Marcial Gonzalez, University of California, Berkeley, “Where Do Social Inequalities Come From? Class Divides in Latina/o Literature;”
- Gregory Dean Meyerson, North Carolina A&T State University, “It’s Not Personal, It’s Business; or, How (Not) to Teach about the Rich.”
- Sue Rowe Doe, Colorado State Univ., Fort Collins;
- Alice Emery, Southern Connecticut State Univ.;
- Marcia Newfield, Borough of Manhattan Community Coll., City Univ. of New York; and
- Emma Widener, Southern Connecticut State Univ.

Malcolm A. Kline is the Executive Director of Accuracy in Academia. If you would like to comment on this article, e-mail mal.kline@academia.org.

FLAWED HISTORY @ MLA

Spencer Irvine



Perhaps one of the unfortunate byproducts of the lumping together of English and History under the rubric “Humanities” is that English professors start to think of themselves as historians. When they try to be, they prove that they are not.

At the Modern Language Association’s annual meeting in Chicago, Katharina Motyl from Germany’s Free University claimed that women and children were also at Abu Ghraib as inmates. Excusing Abu Ghraib’s infamy “would give a lie to the Bush administration” that these Middle Eastern wars were to free both women and children from repressive regimes, she argued.

Abu Ghraib has long been a favorite topic of the English professors who congregate at the MLA. As Accuracy in Academia Executive Director Mal Kline pointed out when the story was still current in 2006: “An independent panel investigated the allegations of abuses at Defense Department detention centers shortly after the Abu Ghraib stories broke in the U. S. media. Chaired by Secretaries of Defense from Republican and Democratic presidential administrations, the panel’s findings indicate that the media coverage that Abu Ghraib received was overblown.



“Since the beginning of hostilities in Afghanistan and Iraq, U. S. military and security operations have apprehended about 50,000 individuals,’ the independent panel reported. ‘From this number, about 300 allegations of abuse in Afghanistan, Iraq or Quantanamo have arisen.”

“As of mid-August 2004, 155 investigations into the allegations have been completed, resulting in 66 substantiated cases. Approximately one-third of these cases occurred at the point of capture or tactical collection point, frequently under uncertain, dangerous or violent circumstances.”

“Harold Brown, who served as Secretary of Defense for President Jimmy Carter, co-chaired the panel with James Schlessinger, President Gerald Ford’s Defense Secretary. Their report stands as the latest official record on Abu Ghraib abuses, although numerous current and former public officials have made pronouncements on the controversy.”

In that same session, Patricia Suelke of Boston University showed photographs with accompanying descriptions that she wrote, focusing only on one photograph of blood stains on a floor in El Salvador while children surrounded it. It is useful to know who spilled the blood in El Salvador and any other war-torn nation.

In El Salvador, communist rebel forces tried to take over the country during the Carter and Reagan Years. When the government held elections in 1982, FMLN rebels,

backed by Cuba’s Fidel Castro, tried to disrupt them.

“To help prevent voter fraud, the government planned to have voters dip their fingers in indelible ink as a mark of their participation,” Edward A. Lynch wrote in his book, *The Cold War’s Last Battlefield: Reagan, the Soviets and Central America*. “The FMLN promised to sever any stained fingers they found.”

“They threatened to put land mines on the roads leading to the polling places and shut down the power. On election day, the FMLN repeatedly broadcast the slogan, ‘Vote today, die tonight.’” A professor at Rollins College, Lynch served in the Reagan Administration.



On that same MLA panel, Jim Hicks of UMass, said that the My Lai massacre in Vietnam “redefined us.” He

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The AJC is a joint project of Accuracy in Media and Accuracy in Academia

criticized the presence of chemical weapons, which some knew as “yellow rain,” and its use in Vietnam.

As for My Lai, as Accuracy in Media founder Reed Irvine wrote in 2001, “There is another Vietnam story, one involving the notorious My Lai massacre carried out by U.S. Army troops in Vietnam in March 1968 that I believe deserves more attention than it has received. AIM member Harvey H. Wilkins of Colton, Calif., sent me an AP story by Leslie Zganjar published on the front page of the Riverside Press-Enterprise on March 2 telling about the valiant effort of an American helicopter pilot and his crew to save Vietnamese women and children from death at the hands of American army troops at My Lai.

“If you missed this story, you may have seen on TV or read about the heroic humanitarianism of Hugh C. Thompson Jr, Lawrence Colburn and Glenn Andreotta when they were honored on March 6 at a ceremony at the Vietnam Memorial in Washington. They were awarded the Soldier’s Medal, the Army’s highest decoration for bravery in action not involving conflict with an enemy. The award to Glenn Andreotta was posthumous; he died in a helicopter crash two weeks after My Lai. I had never heard of these men before. I have never condoned what our troops did at My Lai, but I have criticized the media for giving it so much attention while ignoring the Communist massacre of some 5,000 civilian inhabitants of Hue during their occupation of that city in February 1968. I wish the media had reported the Thompson story prominently when the My Lai story broke late in 1969 because I think it would have done much to counter the impression that our troops in Vietnam were all sadistic killers.”

The MLA has a similar problem: When it looks at the world, it tends to overlook its dictators. For example, although the title of a panel at the Modern Language Association indicated it would be a forum for dissident Iranian artists, the panelists made few claims that the dictatorship there might dispute.

Several panelists debated interpretations of contemporary Iranian art and film in a session entitled, “Media, Justice, and Revolution in Contemporary Middle East.” Only 15

people in attendance, including a moderator and three panelists. The panel featured Babak Elahi, an associate professor at the Rochester Institute of Technology, Pouneh Saeedi, a Trent University professor and Amy Motlagh of the American University of Cairo.

Elahi analyzed an Iranian art website called “Tehran Avenue,” which has since been shut down by the Iranian government. He felt that “Iran’s aesthetic sphere is caught between” Islamic power on one hand and economics on the other, which is reflected in contemporary (or modern-day) Iranian art. Elahi described Iranian artists today with words such as “courage” and yet, mentioned the Green Revolution as a “floundering” protest movement without mentioning the Iranian government’s brutal suppression of opposition activists and protesters. He went on to say, “...with the election of Hasan Rouhani, and the [potential] thawing of relations between Iran and the United States” that hope is on the horizon for both Iran and the U.S. as well as their diplomatic relations.

Saeedi noted how “blogs continue to be a force to be reckoned with in Iranian cyberspace” and how it has changed the political environment in Iran. Although Facebook is exclusively banned in Iran, she saw that “despite the ban on social media,” Iran’s Ayatollah joined social media platforms to counter the West’s and “Zionists’...soft war” on Iranian culture via social media. Unlike Elahi, Saeedi noted how bloggers have been subject to imprisonment and how one blogger has stayed away from politics and writes only on cultural issues.

Motlagh focused on the concept of justice and mercy that can be found in Iranian films. She found that “mercy contravenes human results” and that in the majority of Iranian films like *The Separation*, the “mercy in Iran’s judicial system” has been exposed to the international public. But, Motlagh admitted that Iranian cinema reiterates both the sovereignty and power of the Iranian regime.

At the Modern Language Association’s “Cuba on Stage” panel in Chicago, which only had eleven people in attendance, (excluding the moderator and three panelists), Fidel Castro escaped criticism and mention by name



from several art and music professors. David Lisenby of Albany-SUNY, Elena Valdez of Swarthmore College and Bretton White of Colby College, gave their presentations on Cuban music and art.

Lisenby focused on one Cuban playwright, Estorino, and how his play illustrated the plight of gay plays and art pieces. He said, "...the institutionalized homophobia of the performing arts" limited and handicapped Cuban plays in the 1970s and it affected generations of artistic Cubans. For example, Lisenby said that artists and performers were relegated and assigned "menial work" by the Cuban government as the arts became underappreciated. Yet Fidel Castro and those running the Cuban government escaped mention by Lisenby.

Elena Valdez's presentation focused on fringe and underground music groups such as Las Krudas Cubensi (a lesbian rap group) and other reggaeton music artists. The Krudas group, along with most rappers, "claim to be a revolution within a revolution" as a "vocal form of political expression." Valdez went on to say that the current status quo of Cuban women "relates to imperialism."

These underground groups had done "particularly radical stunts against the Cuban government" and ended up creating, in Valdez's opinion, "a mass-mediated public sphere" for discussion on current events. One such

group called Aldea (or "The Villages"), was banned from performing after being interviewed by CNN in 2005 and 2009. They focus on legitimizing their voice, undermining state ideology and try action through confrontation.

Another group, called Porno Para Ricardo, sought out the "denouncement of communism and the regime" because the Castro government was not communist enough in their eyes. Yet, they like other underground music groups, are forced to use "transgressive performances to challenge the hegemony" of Cuba and its government.

Bretton White pointed out that one specific Cuban art piece in Havana. "Happily Ever After" (or Realidad), was an official government art exhibition and is a stretch of mirrors facing the Caribbean from a narrow walkway along Havana's coastline. She explained the symbolism of it, having passersby reflect on what separates Havana from the world, or the sea. White said that it also helps people reflect on "detras del muro," or what is behind the sea wall around Havana. She said that "Happily Ever After"

allows visitors to imagine "a pattern of thought and action of getting through everyday space" and you can look at it "as a revolution of the utopian socialist" experiment in Cuba. White observed that the art piece "seems to mark the halfway point of limitlessness and seeing oneself" and "the mirror

becomes a physical barrier between self and city."

Spencer Irvine is a staff writer at Accuracy in Academia. If you would like to comment on this article, e-mail mal.kline@academia.org.



THREATENED TRADITIONS

Kristin Theresa Jaroma

The greatest writers and critics get ironically short shrift at the Modern Language Association's annual meeting so it is worthy of note when they get their due.

T.S. Eliot, like G.K. Chesterton, is "concerned with illustrating the limiting and crippling effect of a separation from tradition and orthodoxy upon certain writers whom I [Eliot] nevertheless hold up for admiration for what they have attempted against great obstacles," quotes Utah State University's Associate Professor of English, Alan Blackstock, in his speech "Chesterton, Eliot, and Modernist Heresy" at the Modern Language Association (MLA) Convention in Chicago last week.

Blackstock states that Eliot and Chesterton utilized the notions of orthodoxy and heresy to evaluate and critique the works and sway of a number of the most well-known literary figures of their day. Some of the literary giants these men took on were admired and held in high esteem, while others had a cultural influence which Chesterton and Eliot found problematic, or worse.

As Chesterton wrote in the introduction to his work, *Heretics*,

I am not concerned with Mr. Rudyard Kipling as a vivid artist or a vigorous personality; I am concerned with him as a Heretic—that is to say, a man whose view of things has the hardihood to differ from mine. I am not concerned with Mr. Bernard Shaw as one of the most brilliant and one of the most honest men alive; I am concerned with him as a Heretic—that is to say, a man whose philosophy is quite solid, quite coherent, and quite wrong.

Similarly, in a series of lectures which were compiled and published as one work, *After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy*, Eliot set out to communicate the "deleterious cultural effect" predominant unorthodox writers may have.

Mainly referring to poets and artists such as Ezra Pound, William Butler Yeats, Thomas Hardy, and Irving Babbitt, Eliot wrote that,

If we value them [heretical writers] as we value ourselves we shall go astray. And in the present state of affairs, with the low degree of education to be expected of the public and of reviewers, we are more likely to go wrong than right.

Blackstock explains that Chesterton would have drawn

a correlation between literary modernism and the Modernist movement in the Catholic Church, as a result of his strong Catholic identity. The latter was pronounced heretical by the Holy See in 1907 for throwing the "authority and infallibility of the Church and Bible" into doubt. Chesterton had a "fiery resolution" to prove his pen mightier than those who challenged the traditions that, as far as he was concerned, gave meaning to literature and life in general. Eliot, too, deplored the erosive quality of modernist literature.

Blackstock points out that Chesterton "reserves his sharpest criticism for those writers and critics who sought to divorce art and literature from their ethical tasks."

Chesterton and Eliot agreed with one another that the primary threat to orthodox traditions and beliefs is heresy, Blackstock reiterates.

T.S. Eliot sums up Professor Blackstock's purpose:

All I have been able to do here is to suggest that there are standards of criticism, not ordinarily in use, which may apply to whatever is offered to us as works of philosophy or art, which might help to render them safer or more profitable to us.

Orthodoxy calls for the maintaining of a relationship between tradition and moral criticism.

While it is undoubtedly good to reflect upon great literature and works of art, applying mathematical equations to them might be a bit much.

"[Wordsworth's] apostrophe to the Imagination exemplifies 'consciousness of self raised to apocalyptic pitch.'" Or at least, so claimed Joshua Wilner of City College and The Graduate Center in his presentation, "The Mathematical Sublime and Chaos Theory in Kant and Wordsworth," at the 129th Modern Language Association (MLA) Convention this week.

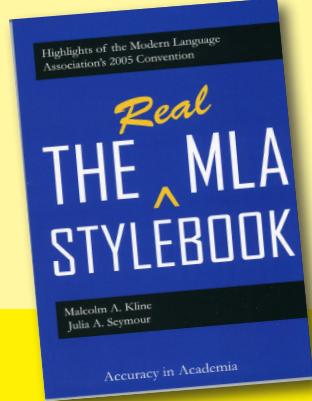
Joining thousands of English professors in the Windy City, on January 9, 2014, Wilner presented his ideas on how chaos theory is an essential component of the philosophical concept of the sublime.

Kristin Jaroma holds a B.A. in English Language & Literature from Christendom College. She is currently contributing part-time to Accuracy in Academia.

The REAL MLA Stylebook

To show what college and university English Departments are really teaching, Accuracy in Academia compiled *The REAL MLA Stylebook*, filled with quotes from a recent convention of the Modern Language Association (MLA) where thousands of English professors gather to push their politically correct, radical agenda. Outsiders who attend this event expecting to learn more about Chaucer, Milton and Shakespeare are in for a rude awakening when they discover that panels are more likely to focus on topics such as “Marxism and Globalization;” “What’s the Matter with Whiteness,” and “Queering Faulkner.”

This book is must-reading for anyone interested in learning more about the mindset of faculty members who are tasked with teaching the great works of the English language to our nation’s students.



You can order your copy of *The REAL MLA Stylebook* using the coupon below or order online at the AIM store: www.ShopAIM.org

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