

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

CAMPUS REPORT

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THE ABCs OF THE MLA

By Malcolm A. Kline and Spencer Irvine

How English professors learn the
alphabet

If you want to see how far the English major is removed from actual literature, watch a bunch of English professors in action. We’ve been doing this annually during the 30 years Accuracy in Academia has been in existence by making annual forays to the Modern Language Association (MLA) convention and getting a fairly representative sampling of what is offered in English courses and textbooks around the country.

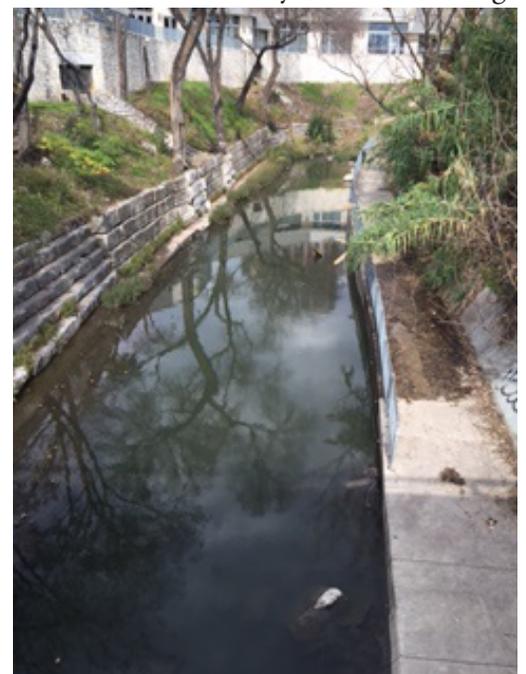
Thousands of English profs gather at these confabs and listen to hundreds of panels and presentations by their peers and budding PhDs who are soon to join their ranks and turn their theses into classes. To show you the wide range of these scholars’ interests, most of which fall outside the realm of the literary, we decided to present to you our latest findings from the MLA 2016 conference in Austin, Texas, alphabetically.

Aging @ the MLA

One way in which the world’s largest conclave of English professors—the Modern Language Association (MLA)—lives up to its name is to leave attendees at its annual conferences with a new vocabulary that they cannot shake.

Thus, after a couple of days at one of these annual meet-ups, you find yourself uttering sentences such as, “We must ascertain whether we are witnessing a discursive binary or a recursive modality.” Similarly, the MLA loves intersections.

For example, the latest MLA convention in Austin, Texas featured a panel on “The Oldest Profession: Teaching and Aging.” We learned that one of



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Director's Corner

By Malcolm A. Kline, Executive Director of AIA



February 1, 2016

Voodoo Anyone?

How to Understand Economics Without Really Trying



by
Christopher T. Warden

Forewords by M. Stanton Evans & Malcolm A. Kline


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Please remember AIA in your will.

Dear Reader,

Every year that we attend the Modern Language Association (MLA) annual convention brings with it a new epiphany. We go to the MLA in order to find out what English professors are professing. Most of the time, it is anything but literary.

Oddly, the MLA may be less in danger of inaccuracy when they stay away from classic literature. I try to make a point of attending panel discussions at the MLA on one of my favorite authors—Charles Dickens. These sessions do indeed tend to be trying. This year, professors and PhDs dissected his last novel, *Our Mutual Friend*, in a panel on “Dickens and Disability.”

I make a point of reading these novels after hearing the discussions in order to see how the former resembles the latter, if at all. Usually, they don't. This year's panel followed that rule and served to cause me to reflect that while professors in days gone by served as guides to great literature, today's “literary scholars” often act as gatekeepers, blocking access to it.

By the way, *Our Mutual Friend* is still a tale worth getting acquainted with. Arguably, Dickens saved the best for last in characters and plot lines but don't take our word for it: Unlike the MLA, we urge you to see it for yourself.

Incidentally, *Our Mutual Friend* contains some Dickens epigrams you are unlikely to ever see pondered at MLA conferences, such as: “If great criminals told the truth—which being great criminals, they do not—they would very rarely tell of their struggles against the crime. Their struggles are towards it.”

All the best,

Mal Kline,
Executive Director

the speakers, Helene Meyers of Southwestern University “works at the intersection of Jewish Studies, queer studies and aging studies.”

This intersection produces some strange traffic jams. Meyers sees “contemporary homophobia as a threat to Jewish continuity.” Actually, one of Meyers’ co-panelists made some poignant observations about the current “generation gap” on campus. “Day by day, year by year, I feel my connection with youth is slipping away,” Robert J. Skolnick of the College of William and Mary said on the same panel. “Theirs is a world of clicking and constant updates.”

“Digital media and phones are checked constantly.” Indeed, growing old is hard enough without a cadre of pedagogues telling you what it means.

“Critical aging does not toss the baby out with its ideological bathwater,” LaSalle professor Emily Mattingly said at the MLA meeting in Austin. “Critical aging lifts the hood on dominance.”

At the MLA, Mattingly used Shelley Jackson’s hypertext *Patchwork Girl* to get under the hood. “What if Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* were true?” the ad for *Patchwork Girl* asks. “What if Mary Shelley herself made the monster – not the fictional Dr. Frankenstein?”

“And what if the monster was a woman, and fell in love with Mary Shelley, and travelled to America? This is their story.” And it gets quite gory: There may be more blood in this one than in the original *Frankenstein*.

Mattingly is “currently working on my first book project, *Queer Developments: The Politics of Reimagining Age*,” she writes on her home page. “This monograph examines how American artists, writers, and filmmakers reimagine childhood to construct new visions of aging,” she explains.

She teaches cultural and literary studies, film and media, research courses at La Salle, and also directs the Writing Center at the Delaware College of Art and Design.

Animal Farm @ the MLA

George Orwell might have been amused. Academia is well on its way to quite literally becoming an *Animal Farm*.



Indeed, the very first day of this year’s MLA convention featured a panel on “New Animals: Critical Theory After Posthumanism.”

“The animality of the dog is very different from the animality of the whale,” Moira Weigel, a Ph.D. candidate from Yale, explained. She is trying to “present alternatives to the language of domination and violence that still dominates the treatment of animals in films.”

“Moiras’ academic interests revolve around the intersections of film, literature, and philosophy,” her web site explains. “Her dissertation, *Facing Animals in the Age of Celluloid*, considers a series of sites where modern urban people still encountered animals that became popular



settings for books and movies: the laboratory, sea voyage, circus, zoo, and slaughterhouse.”



“She examines how filmmakers and writers used these settings in order to investigate what it meant to be human, and whether older forms of humanism still had any value, in an age of dead gods and new machines.”

Actually, when you get past the politically correct jargon that frames all of the above, you find that she has actually done something arguably admirable. At a minimum, she has resurrected something that should not be forgotten: the breathtaking photography and video contributions of pioneering photojournalist J. E. Williamson and his stunning images of life on the ocean floor.



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By the way, it's interesting that some of the same people who go ballistic at the suggestion that corporations are people are quite willing to ascribe human attributes to inhuman things. "I'm out to prove that rocks are alive and humans are not," Simon Porzak, a writing instructor at Columbia University said at the

MLA convention in Austin.

Porzak had a slew of lines that kept the crowd at the MLA in stitches:

- "Can I baptize a dog?" (he and his source left the question open)
- "Crossing boundary lines with a pigskin"
- "We never judge other humans in a thinking/non-thinking binary"
- "Our task being clear, how do we build a Ph.D. robot?"

According to his vitae, Porzak's interests include comparative literature, decadence, French Language and

Literature, French Studies and Gender and Sexuality Studies. He is the author of a number of papers including "Inverts and Invertebrates: Darwin, Proust, and Nature's Queer Heterosexuality."

Disability @ the MLA

Capitalism discriminates against the poor and disabled, one professor said during a panel entitled "Disability and the Global South" at the 2016 Modern Language Association's annual convention held in Austin, Texas, not exactly a home for red state conservatives.

J.C. "Jay" Sibara, an assistant professor of English at Colby College (Maine), claimed that "within global capitalism, [we have] a system that wants young and strong workers [which] is always haunted by disability." She shared an anecdote about a colleague who was teaching an "environmental justice media" course and found that students were shocked by the anti-capitalist rhetoric of the course. Sibara said, "These responses may reflect, in Global North Media," the ignoring of the disability issue. (Note: The Global North refers to the free market capitalist economic systems of the U.S., Canada and Western Europe.)

Sibara analyzed a documentary that highlighted environmental justice, but glossed over the pet topic of disability. For Spanish-speaking natives interviewed in the documentary, "the term 'disability' or a Spanish equivalent does not appear in the film." Sibara continued, "Disability was not a concept that came up" among

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interviewed locals. Apparently, unknown to Sibara, native Spanish speakers are aware of disabilities, but rarely use them as an excuse or a crutch to avoid working (outside of severe disabilities and illnesses).

Yet and still, the manner in which the MLA defines disability befits the modern language part of its acronym. This tendency is nowhere more apparent than when they seek to apply it to the most masterful men of letters.

“Dickens use of the word ‘queer’ is uncannily similar to the modern use of the word,” Natalie Prizel, a PhD candidate from Yale announced at this year’s MLA meeting. Actually, Dickens used it, in *Our Mutual Friend*, the book under discussion at the MLA panel on Dickens and Disability, as an adjective meaning strange, not as a noun meaning homosexual.

Part of the problem may be that, no matter how they admire the immortal Charles, analysts such as Natalie are trained in today’s universities. Natalie, for example, is “currently working on a dissertation entitled *The Good Look: Victorian Visual Ethics and the Problem of Physical Difference* that juxtaposes Ruskinian aesthetic theory, and contemporary disability theory, and Victorian thinking about labor to examine Victorian fiction, non-fiction prose, and visual art objects as they depict encounters with disabled persons at work.”

Her areas of interest are “Mid-Victorian prose, John Ruskin, Nineteenth-century art and visual culture, The Pre-Raphaelites, Disability theory, Queer theory, Victorian aesthetic, Ethics, Art history.”

Wait until she becomes a full professor. “My work is on precocity,” Mallory Cohn, one of Prizel’s co-panelists said, “sexual precocity or whatever.”

Environmental Activism @ the MLA

“There is a conflict between the politics of freedom and environmental activism,” Jana Maria Giles said at the recent 2016 Modern Language Association (MLA)

meeting. Giles, who teaches at the University of Louisiana at Monroe, made clear which side of the divide she is on. Last year, she wrote an article entitled “Dog-paddling Against the Tide: Integrating Ecocriticism into a New Graduate English Course in a Southern Public Regional University.”

“This paper recounts the experience of teaching an English MA graduate course in environmental humanities for the first time at a public regional university in northeastern Louisiana,” she wrote. “The region is one of the poorest in the United States, there is little environmental activism in the local community, and the students had little formal education in environmental issues or in literary theory in general prior to the course.”

“At the same time, Louisiana is experiencing severe coastal erosion which constitutes a national disaster. Texts used for the course included *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (2011), by Timothy Clark; British Romantic poetry; *Walden* (1854) by Henry David Thoreau; *The Monkey-Wrench Gang* (1975) by Edward Abbey; *Ceremony* (1977) by Leslie Marmon Silko; *Disgrace* (2000) by J.M. Coetzee; *The Hungry Tide* (2006) by Amitav Ghosh; and *Bayou Farewell* (2004) by Mike Tidwell.”

“While the students appreciated the literary texts and theory, their response to the possibility of activism regarding our current environmental crises was muted and pessimistic. However, after the completion of the course, several students went on to implement change both locally and internationally, or reported that their attitude towards nature had been substantially modified.”

Feminism, Dressmaking and Gardening @ the MLA

Harriet Beecher Stowe, European gardens and gender bias were discussed in an MLA panel entitled, “Bootstrapping Broads: On the Work of Writing Labor.”

Gretchen Murphy, a professor of English at the University of Texas-Austin, spoke at length about Harriet Beecher



Stowe and her experience in 19th century England. She saw Stowe as “a female celebrity” in her time, but restricted in what she could do and say because Stowe was “reproducing the vision of elite British philanthropists,” hinting at the common feminist term, ‘patriarchy.’ Murphy criticized the labor market of that era and conditions

of the dressmaking industry. She averred that there was a “double trap” of purchasers claiming no knowledge of wages and consumers not claiming responsibility for rushing orders and straining workers. Oftentimes, “workers [were] boarding and working along [with the] proprietor in the dressmaking residence,” she said. Murphy was critical of dressmaking patrons and their owners, where workers boarded with the owners and patrons rarely saw the workers. This model “prevented regulation” of dressmaking shops and businesses and factory laws did not affect these house-based businesses.

It apparently never occurred to her that the dressmakers and customers may not have wanted to see each other and that the former found boarding with their employers to be economically advantageous: cheap rent with amenities. Ironically, that same panel featured a lecturer who compared America’s current economy unfavorably to Europe’s present-day marketplace, with about as much justification.

Kaye Wierzbicki, a junior fellow in Garden and Landscape Studies at the Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection in Washington, D.C., compared European and American personalities by way of comparing gardens. She pointed out that most European gardens have gravel, are orderly and uniform. Americans typically have secure pavement and are rather unorganized, in her opinion. This reflects on the mindsets and personalities of the two cultures, Wierzbicki said, and that Europeans typically do not rank salary or prestige in jobs. “Jobs are organized by a general field,” she said, “[There is] no judgment or

ranking” in Europe. Also, she said that “Domestic arts and sciences section includes housekeeping” in Europe, where “Work is work is work” and people prefer “work over profession.” This, she felt, “[is] the invisible substructure of work” at play.

She failed to note that Europe also boasts high unemployment and economic stagnation, no matter how pretty their gardens are.

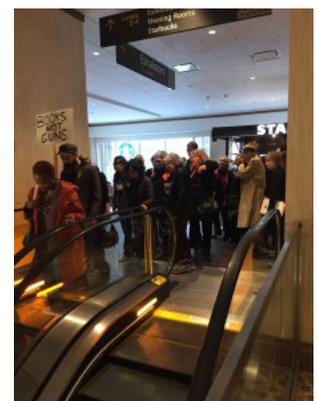
On that same panel, Marion Rust, an associate professor of English and director of the Committee on Social Theory at the University of Kentucky, lashed out at the patriarchy, a favorite pastime of MLA members of both genders. She said there is an “expected behavior for women professors” and no corresponding code of conduct for men. Moreover, she claimed that “the perceptions that women have soft and sweet personalities” hurt students. She went on to complain about what she saw as the censure of women who are “inappropriately aggressive.” Aggressiveness in men, she asserts, is prized.

For many women professors, they have to “carefully [know] how to present themselves, not too strong, but not too soft,” Rust said.

Guns @ the MLA

No, don’t worry, they’re not packing heat, at least not that we know of. In fact, they don’t want anyone to put the second amendment to practical use.

In the Lone Star State, where open carry is now legal in public places, the Modern Language Association thought it was timely to protest guns on public college campuses, called “campus carry” by advocates and opponents alike. The language professors set aside time in their busy convention schedule to march up Congress Avenue to the limestone-colored State Capitol Building (which happens to be taller than the white-painted U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C.).



About 100 professors were in attendance, with a handful of couples and their children, marching eight city blocks from a hotel conference center. Some wore bright orange t-shirts emblazoned with the phrase “Armed with Reason.” One could say that they made themselves easy targets, for one reason or another. During the march, the professors chanted slogans such as “Armed with Reason,” “No Guns, No Cops, No Violence,” “Gun Free U-T, Keep It Safe for You and Me,” “If We Don’t Get It, Shut It Down,” “Guns Don’t Belong In School, They Are Not a Teaching Tool.”



feet of the speakers could hear the speeches.



In the end, despite their energy and excitement for these professors, there was no large crowd at the Capitol to welcome them, barely any press and many confused Austin residents downtown.

And we’re not even halfway through the alphabet!



Many bystanders and passersby were confused by it and some recorded it on their smartphones, wondering who were the ones marching against guns and why do it at around 1 PM in downtown Austin.

The irony was rich during the anti-campus carry protest, where the protesters passed by not only state monuments to the heroes of the Alamo, but also a monument to the Confederacy. Half a dozen state troopers arrived in case any trouble arose, but were mostly relegated to bystander status.

The protesters stood in front of the Capitol building, continued to chant slogans, and quieted down for a series of speeches by designated professors and organizers.

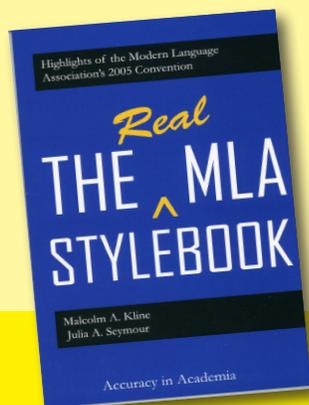
However, the bullhorn they used was not working. It could have been due to low batteries, but barely anyone outside a couple of



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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