MLA Committee on Honors and Awards

Annual Report, 2014–15

The Committee on Honors and Awards oversees the procedures that result in the nomination and determination of those receiving MLA honors and awards and reviews proposals for new honorary members and fellows. The committee normally meets annually and reviews, at least once every three years, its procedures and the procedures used by its subcommittees. It reports annually to the Executive Council on the recipients of all honors and awards. It reports periodically to the council regarding significant changes in procedures or in the nature of the honors and awards.

Since the CHA met late this past year, after some committees had begun their work, it was necessary to fill this past year’s vacancies before the meeting. Names were suggested by committee members via a private group created on MLA Commons.

The CHA met at the MLA office on 27 April 2015. Those present were committee members Gwendolyn Barnes-Karol, Susan Lanser, Jacques Lezra, Leah Marcus, Mark Pietralunga (chair), and Carlos Vega as well as MLA staff members Rosemary G. Feal, Annie Reiser, and Doug Steward. Not present was committee member Yasemin Yildiz.

Date for Next Meeting
The date for next year’s meeting is 11 March 2016.

Honorary Fellow
The committee discussed a suggested nominee for honorary fellowship. The suggestion was submitted by a member of the association. The committee reviewed the work of the proposed nominee in relation to that of current honorary fellows. The committee also discussed
the seeming arbitrariness of the current nomination process. The committee decided to forward the suggestion to the Executive Council, with the majority of members neither endorsing nor opposing the nomination. [Note: The council declined to make the nomination because it did not receive enough information about the proposed nominee. The council plans to clarify the current submission requirements for proposals of honorary fellows.]

**Communications from Prize Committees**

The committee discussed messages from three prize selection committees. It was decided that the MLA staff would respond to a statement from the selection committee for the MLA Prize for Studies in Native American Literatures, Cultures, and Languages regarding conflicts of interest. The CHA recommended that the conflict-of-interest policy be amended to include specific mention of judging work in smaller fields.

The CHA addressed the concern of the selection committee for the Scaglione Prize for French and Francophone Studies about the quality of some entries in last year’s competition. The CHA decided that there were enough strong entries to make the selection competitive.

The CHA also addressed a request for a clarification of the definition of a first book from the selection committee for the MLA Prize for a First Book. The CHA confirmed that authors or editors are eligible when submitting their first book-length publication. Additionally, the author’s or editor’s age, institutional rank, or affiliation should not be considered during deliberations. It was agreed that the MLA staff would revise prize selection guidelines so that they are consistent with prize descriptions.

**Proposal to Allow Books in More than One Competition**

The Executive Council asked for the CHA’s feedback on a proposal to allow books to enter more than one competition. The committee endorsed the idea of allowing books to be entered in either the James Russell Lowell Prize or MLA Prize for a First Book competition and
one other competition. The CHA proposed that the new policy be given a two-year testing period to determine if the Lowell and First Book committees would be comfortable with what will most likely be a higher number of entries. The CHA also recommended changing the deadline for the MLA Prize for a First Book from 1 April to 1 March to allow for a more extended reading time.

**Implementation of New Prize**

The CHA established that the Matei Calinescu Prize would hold its first competition in 2016, with books published in 2014 or 2015 eligible to compete. The deadline for entries will be 1 April. The selection committee has five members and was appointed by the CHA via its private group on *MLA Commons*.

**Appointments to Selection Committees**

The CHA appointed one member to a 2015 committee and twenty-six members to 2016 committees. It appointed fifteen current committee members to serve as chairs in 2016.