

Report on the NeMLA 2018 Conference, April 12-15, at the Omni William Penn Hotel, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

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The 49th Annual Convention of the Northeast Modern Language Association took place at the Omni William Penn Hotel in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania from April 12-15, 2018. This year's theme was *Global Spaces, Local Landscapes and Imagined Worlds*. A simple one-word take on this conference is expansive. Over four days there are more than 400 sessions covering a wide array of interests in literature and language, and in each time slot more than 20 sessions are running simultaneously. The topics covered are so expansive that nothing really stands out as a focal point. However, each year featured speakers include a few current authors from a variety of genres. All attendees receive the following year's book to be discussed by its author at the opening of the conference: next year Imbolo Mbue will speak about her recent and acclaimed novel *Behold the Dreamers*.

One featured speaker of interest to me was David Castillo whose topic was *Truth, Reality in the Age of Inflationary Media: Why the Humanities are More Important than Ever*, similar to his recently published book. In his talk he outlined his concerns that the humanities are shrinking at a time when well-turned lucid communication is most needed in order to educate and guide the public. The humanities, he feels, are better able than the ever-expanding sciences and IT fields to counteract rightist propaganda spewed from the Trump administration. He discussed cases where Trump manipulated public opinion, which he feels the humanities must counteract. Indeed, three conference sessions were specifically about Trump (*Trump Fiction; Trump and Feminism; and also Global Literature, in the Age of Trump*), as were papers in other sessions. I too was discussed in regard to the rightist agenda because during Castillo's talk my jet lag was so severe that my visible reactions were off, and my hair so short, which, together, made some worry that I was there to disrupt their liberal gathering. Luckily, I was (just barely) able to dispel their concerns at the reception that followed. A few other sessions that greatly impressed me were on teaching tone, culture, and close reading, the ethics of world literature, and politics in comics and graphic narratives. There were a few presentations on using literature in language teaching, which has been

the case for the past few years. For a better understanding of the scope of topics covered, refer to the program available at the NeMLA homepage.

I plan to attend next year's annual conference to be held in Washington, D.C. from March 21-24. A fairly new and expanding field of possible interest to JALT members is *South Asian Studies*. It has been underrepresented in the past but is seeing a surge in interest. It is just one of the many calls for papers for the 2019 conference that will close on September 30th, 2018. My concluding thoughts on this conference are best expressed by saying that the 50th conference in 2019 will be my fifth in a row.