

Elena Poniatowska to read at Modern Language Association conference special session on Dec. 29 at Hyatt Regency San Diego

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ELENA PONIATOWSKA TO READ AT MODERN

LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE SPECIAL SESSION

The award-winning Mexican author and journalist Elena Poniatowska will read and discuss her current work-in-progress at 5:15 p.m., Thursday, Dec. 29, in the Manchester Ballroom A, at the Hyatt Regency San Diego.

The event is part of the annual Modern Language Association (MLA) Convention, which is billed as one of the largest gatherings of teachers and scholars in the field of the humanities.

Poniatowska has been invited by and will be introduced by members of the faculty from the Department of Literature at the University of California, San Diego, who will lead the post-reading discussion period.

According to the author, "I will speak on the novel I am writing (with a Guggenheim scholarship) on what science means to a third world country, and how hard it is for a young Latin American scientist to have society not only help him, but believe in him.

"We (in Mexico) usually think it is easier to import American 'know-how' and American technology than to produce our own science, which will always cost more. That is why there is such brain-drain (of young Latin American scholars) and why many young people prefer to leave Mexico and work in the United States."

Poniatowska was born in Paris, in 1932, to a Mexican mother and a French/Polish/American father. She moved with her mother and sister to Mexico in 1941, escaping the German occupation of France, while her father remained to serve in the Second World War.

Poniatowska attended the College of the Holy Cross near Philadelphia, then returned to Mexico City where she worked for the Mexico City newspapers Excelsior and Novedades. In 1978, she won the Mexican National Journalism Prize for interviewing. She is best known for her documentary and testimonial fiction.

Critics have said that Poniatowska interweaves political denunciation and social awareness with sophisticated narrative techniques and journalistic reportage to create a complex picture of power relations, social class and gender identity. Over the past 30 years, Poniatowska has served as an outspoken critic of the ruling party, the PRI. Her book, "Fuerte es el silencio" (1980, "Silence is strong"), chronicles government intransigence toward disadvantaged segments of society and opposition movements. Among Poniatowska's best-known works are, "Nada, nadie" (Nothing, nobody); "Tinísima" (1991, based on the life of contemporary Italian activist and photographer Tina Modotti); and "La Flor de Lis" (1988, an autobiographical novel).

In her work, "La noche de Tlatelolco" (1971, translated as "Massacre in Mexico" in 1975 and 1992), her account of witnesses to a bloody massacre was her answer to the silence of the government and the press regarding a dire moment in Mexican history. (In 1968, government troops attacked hundreds of unarmed civilians, many of them students, at a rally in the Plaza de Tlatelolco.) The book continues to receive critical acclaim. Its publication, critics said, marked the arrival of an original voice in contemporary Mexican narrative.

The MLA convention will take place at the San Diego Hyatt Regency from Dec. 27-30. For information on the reading, call the UCSD Department of Literature at 534-3210.

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