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## Wai Chee Dimock Appointed New Editor of *PMLA*



The MLA Executive Council has selected Wai Chee Dimock, William Lampson Professor of English and American Studies at Yale University, to succeed Simon Gikandi as the editor of *PMLA*.

Dimock has written on a wide range of topics in American literature and popular culture. Her books include *Empire for Liberty: Melville and the Poetics of Individualism* (Princeton UP, 1989); *Residues of Justice: Literature, Law, Philosophy* (U of California P, 1996); *Through Other Continents: American Literature across Deep Time* (Princeton UP, 2006); and the collections *Rethinking Class: Literary Studies and Social Formations*, coedited with Michael T. Gilmore (Columbia UP, 1994), and *Shades of the Planet: American Literature as World Literature*, coedited with Lawrence Buell (Princeton UP, 2007). She is also the author of film criticism in the *Los Angeles Review of Books* and essays in *Critical Inquiry*, the *New Yorker*, the *New York Times*, and other periodicals. She received her PhD from Yale University.

"Editing *PMLA* is both an honor and a daunting task," Dimock said. "I'm thrilled to be given this challenge and will do my best to strengthen the journal's core mission as a broad-based forum where young scholars can publish their best work and established scholars can test their new ideas in a rigorous review process. I hope at the same time to build on several new lines of inquiry that have been mapped out under the editorship of Simon Gikandi. These include the digital humanities and creolized and endangered tongues, seen against English as a dominant global language. Canonical works no less than emerging genres benefit from the pressures of these new methodologies, even as they face the unprecedented challenge of what is arguably the key issue of our time: climate change. Literary studies can do much to meet the demands of the twenty-first century; a rapidly changing world invites us to be inventive in response. Toward that end, *PMLA* especially welcomes essays that cross disciplinary boundaries as well as boundaries of period, genre, and media, and create a common ground between writing for an academic audience and writing for the public."

Dimock's term begins in July 2016 and runs for three years. (Members should continue to send submissions to the journal at the MLA office.)

## 2015 Election Results

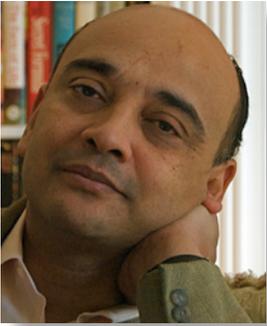
In the elections conducted last fall, Anne Ruggles Gere (English, Univ. of Michigan, Ann Arbor) was elected second vice president of the association.

Lenora Hanson (Univ. of Wisconsin, Madison), David Tsechien Pan (Univ. of California, Irvine), and Rafael A. Ramirez Mendoza (Univ. of California, Los Angeles) were elected to at-large seats on the Executive Council for four-year terms (11 January 2016 through the close of the January 2020 convention). Angelika Bammer (Emory Univ.) was elected to the Executive Council from the Delegate Assembly for the same term.

Fifty-two new representatives were elected to the Delegate Assembly. Seventeen delegates were elected to

represent special-interest categories in the assembly, and thirty-five delegates were elected to represent seven geographical regions in the United States and Canada. A listing of all members of the Delegate Assembly can be found at the MLA Web site ([www.mla.org/del\\_assembly\\_members](http://www.mla.org/del_assembly_members)).

In addition, new members were elected to the forum executive committees. The listing of executive committee members at the MLA Web site ([www.mla.org/About-Us/Governance/Committees/Committee-Listings/Forum-Executive-Committees](http://www.mla.org/About-Us/Governance/Committees/Committee-Listings/Forum-Executive-Committees)) has been updated to include new committee members' names.



## Boundary Conditions

Boundary Conditions, the theme for our meeting in Philadelphia next January, will provide the convention not with a focus but with a set of challenges. For mathematicians, boundary conditions are the parameters that define the space within which one seeks solutions. So the theme offers, first, an invitation to reflect together on the parameters within which our profession takes place. One of the most evident of these is the increasing pressure we face to abandon the ideal of a college education that prepares you not only for success at work but also for a meaningful life. And that's what I'd like to write to you about, briefly, in my first president's column.

As humanists, we are inevitably drawn to reflecting on these questions historically as well as

theoretically. And, in thinking about our situation today, I find myself reminded of Matthew Arnold's claim that "culture seeks to do away with classes; to make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere; to make all men live in an atmosphere of sweetness and light" (79). The word *culture* can mean many things (and nothing), but Arnold is talking here about the ideal of a liberal education, an education for free women and men.

None of this could be put in exactly these terms today. Even aside from the reference to "all men," rather than "everyone," many today would be skeptical of the idea that we could identify "the best that has been thought . . . everywhere" without presupposing standards that came from somewhere in particular. But I am happy to endorse the vision of a liberal education that is of value to people independent of wealth or occupation and that gives us more than a marketable skill.

Most—though, happily, not all—MLA members are college teachers. What we teach ranges over space and time, language and culture, genre and medium; our tools are as diverse as the subjects and the objects about which we think, teach, and write. In helping our students to think and to read, to write and to talk critically and knowledgeably about our diverse subject matters, we are surely developing skills that will profit them in their lives at work, inside or outside the academy. But members of our profession are inclined to believe, too, that a college education is a preparation for life and that our place in the system of labor, however important, cannot define the scope of our lives.

The novels and poems you read, the plays and movies and television you watch, the poetry slams you attend, the song lyrics you listen to, the blogs you scrutinize—our understanding and appreciation of all of these are deepened by a well-conceived education in the liberal arts. And they are as much a part of our lives as the goods or services whose provision earns us our daily bread. To say as much is not, for better or worse, to offer an instrumental defense of the humanities. An instrumental defense justifies an activity by reference to values external to that activity. But the experiences and capabilities conferred by humanistic learning are themselves of value.

Many students might flourish in the humanities but avoid humanistic subjects because they're worried about preparing themselves for the job market. The choices they make often depend on misunderstandings about how the subjects they are studying instead will train them for work. A degree in economics is not a particularly good preparation for a career in business; studying the discipline of psychology does not necessarily equip you to be a therapist or a social worker. Yet such students are making a broader error, too—of thinking that college is the gateway to only one part of life, the life of work.

So we need to make the necessary arguments on both fronts: insisting that a major or a minor in our fields, or a substantial exposure to our courses as part of a general education, prepares you for life as it prepares you for work. To conceive of the humanities in humanistic, noninstrumental terms isn't to deny their practical dividends. As I have already maintained, the students who study seriously with us think more critically, write more intelligibly, and interpret the world with a richer range of intellectual and moral resources. This is why we can claim that they are likely to be better workers, and better citizens, and that they will live better lives.

I suspect that many of you will wonder about our authority to make such claims. But that's not because you don't believe them. Few would commit themselves to a life as a scholar-teacher unless they thought that their work was a profound benefit to their students. There will be reasonable disagreement about how to conceive and assess these benefits—but surely a critical engagement with such questions helps establish the boundary conditions of our profession.

K. Anthony Appiah

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Members are invited to comment on the president's column at [president.commonsm.la.org](http://president.commonsm.la.org).

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## Philadelphia 2017: What's New

Take a moment to mark 5–8 January 2017 on your calendar. That's when the MLA returns to Philadelphia for the association's 132nd annual convention. The book exhibit and all MLA sessions and events will take place in the Philadelphia Convention Center and the Philadelphia Marriott Downtown.

The first World Heritage City in the United States and home to historic sites, modern museums, and a vibrant restaurant scene, Philadelphia has added many new attractions since we last visited in 2009.

The Barnes Foundation (with over 3,000 Postimpressionist and early modern works of art) has moved to Center City's Museum Mile, joining the Philadelphia Museum of Art

(which houses the world's largest Impressionist art collection outside Paris) and the Franklin Institute Science Center (with its hands-on permanent exhibit dedicated to the brain). An extensive public art collection includes more than 3,600 murals throughout Philadelphia's many neighborhoods.

The Liberty Bell, Independence Hall, Carpenter's Hall, and the National Constitution Center are a short walk from the convention center, so you can easily brush up on your early American history.

We're already thinking about cultural excursions and other ways to incorporate Philadelphia into the convention. If you have ideas for excursions, please write to Stacey Courtney ([scourtney@mla.org](mailto:scourtney@mla.org)).

## Delegate Assembly News

At its meeting on 9 January 2016 in Austin the Delegate Assembly took the following actions.

The assembly conducted elections for the Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee, the Executive Council, the Nominating Committee, and the Elections Committee. The names of those elected can be found in the relevant committee listing at [www.mla.org/About-Us/Governance/Committees/Committee-Listings](http://www.mla.org/About-Us/Governance/Committees/Committee-Listings).

The assembly received requests and reports or recommendations that required action. In response to requests from the Executive Council and the Committee on Amendments to the Constitution (CAC) for clarification of who should count as a part-time faculty member for the purpose of implementing two motions approved by the 2015 assembly, the assembly determined that MLA members' self-identification with regard to employment status should be used. The CAC also asked for clarification of the assembly's intent with respect to the 2015 motion on providing a seat on the Executive Council for a part-time faculty member. The current assembly determined that an existing council seat be used. The report of the Elections Committee presented two recommendations, revised since the 2015 assembly meeting, on regional and professional-issues representation in the assembly and a new recommendation on the nomination process to be used to establish slates in the elections of forum delegates. The assembly approved the committee's recommendations, one of them with modifications; the implementation of these recommendations awaits the ratification of the constitutional amendments presented in the next report considered by the assembly, from the CAC. This last report requiring action presented six amendments, which the assembly approved. The first amendment provides for the election of a forum delegate by that forum's membership. The second allots an equal number of delegates to each of the seven electoral regions, the number to be determined by the assembly. The third and fourth amendments deal with the elimination of the requirement for proportional representation of graduate students within the seven electoral regions and in the regions overall. The last two amendments provide for professional-issues delegates instead of special-interest delegates and allow the assembly to determine their number and the concerns to be addressed. The amendments will be

reviewed by the Executive Council in February and will then be forwarded to the membership for a ratification vote later this year. Finally, the assembly considered a recommendation from the Executive Council regarding changes in the eligibility criteria for the granting of life membership. Because members continue to teach and work actively in the profession well past the age of sixty-five, the assembly agreed that the current criteria, according to which members of more than twenty years' standing who have retired from teaching and all members who have paid membership dues for forty years are eligible, be changed to thirty years and fifty years, respectively.

The assembly also received the report of the Delegate Assembly Organizing Committee (DAOC), the executive director's report, the Finance Committee's report, and annual reports from the association's standing committees. Delegates had the opportunity to comment on or ask questions about these reports.

In other business, the assembly approved one resolution. It will be forwarded to the Executive Council in February. Following the provisions of article 7.B.3 of the MLA constitution, the council will conduct a review of the constitutional, legal, and fiduciary issues posed by the language of the resolution. If the resolution does not pose any constitutional, legal, or fiduciary problems, the council will forward it to the membership for a ratification vote.

A complete report of the Delegate Assembly meeting will appear in the May 2016 issue of *PMLA*.

### Now Online

**2017 Presidential Theme**  
**News from the MLA**  
**MLA Bibliography Fellowships**  
**Connected Academics**



## CFP for MLA 2017

The 2017 MLA Annual Convention will be held in Philadelphia from 5 to 8 January. Information regarding calls for papers for both session organizers and session participants can be found on the MLA Web site ([www.mla.org/conv\\_papers](http://www.mla.org/conv_papers)). Calls for papers may be submitted until 28 February 2016; calls will not be edited before they appear on the MLA Web site. A call for papers is not a session proposal; program-copy forms for session proposals will be available online by early March and must be submitted by 1 April 2016.

Please note that, because of the new forum structure (implemented for the 2016 convention), divisions and discussion groups now appear as forums on the calls for papers pages. The American Literature Section is included in the list of allied organizations. An updated list of MLA forums can be found at [www.mla.org/Membership/Forums](http://www.mla.org/Membership/Forums).

Members should familiarize themselves with the guidelines for the MLA convention, which appear on the MLA Web site ([www.mla.org/organizing-meetings](http://www.mla.org/organizing-meetings)), before writing to the organizers listed in the calls for papers.

Organizers are responsible for acknowledging all submissions and responding to all inquiries.

Participants must indicate their audiovisual needs when they respond to a call for papers and should check with the chair of the session or with the MLA convention office to be sure that the necessary equipment has been ordered by 1 April 2016.

Members without Internet access who need a printout of the calls for papers should write or call the MLA office to have a copy mailed to them ([membership@mla.org](mailto:membership@mla.org); 646 576-5151).

## Submissions Invited for *Literary Studies in the Digital Age*

The editors of *Literary Studies in the Digital Age: An Evolving Anthology* invite your participation in expanding this living collection and charting new directions in the field of digital literary studies. Please visit the anthology at [dlsanthology.commons.mla.org](http://dlsanthology.commons.mla.org) to read instructions on submitting an essay, to comment on the present volume, and to make suggestions for future topics.

## Contribute to an MLA Volume

The volumes *Approaches to Teaching Austen's Persuasion*, edited by Marcia McClintock Folsom and John Wiltshire; *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Cormac McCarthy*, edited by Stacey Peebles and Benjamin West; and *Approaches to Teaching Plum in the Golden Vase*, edited by Andrew Schonebaum, are now in development in the MLA Approaches to Teaching World Literature series. The surveys and calls for essay proposals for these volumes can be found at [www.mla.org/approaches](http://www.mla.org/approaches). The volume *Teaching Mexicana and Chicana Writers of the Twentieth Century*, edited by Elizabeth C. Martínez, is now in development in the MLA Options for Teaching series. The call for essay proposals can be found at [www.mla.org/options](http://www.mla.org/options).



Kwame Anthony Appiah presents the MLA Prize for a Scholarly Edition to Elizabeth Goldring.

## MLA Prizes Awarded

The winners of seven annual and eight biennial awards given by the MLA were recognized at the January 2016 MLA convention in Austin. Kwame Anthony Appiah, then first vice president of the association, presented the prizes at the MLA Awards Ceremony on 9 January. A complete list of this year's prizewinners appears on the MLA Web site ([www.mla.org/prizewinners](http://www.mla.org/prizewinners)).

The MLA's prizes are awarded under the auspices of the Committee on Honors and Awards, which appoints the members of the selection committees and determines procedures, deadlines, and criteria for eligibility for all prizes. Deadlines for upcoming prizes are online ([www.mla.org/awards-competitions](http://www.mla.org/awards-competitions)). To submit books or to obtain information about any of the prizes, call or write the coordinator of book prizes at the MLA office (646 576-5141; [awards@mla.org](mailto:awards@mla.org)).

## Get Ready for Chairs Registration

Registration for the 2017 MLA Convention in Philadelphia will open in mid-August for MLA members who are chairs of departments that are 2015–16 members of ADE or ADFL. Chairs who wish to request hotel-suite accommodations in Philadelphia should prepare now to ensure access to early registration for the 2017 convention.

Make sure your department's ADE or ADFL membership is current for the academic year 2015–16. For membership forms or information about your department's ADE or ADFL membership status, please contact Roy Chustek at the MLA office (646 576-5133; [rchustek@mla.org](mailto:rchustek@mla.org)).

Make sure your individual MLA membership is current for calendar year 2016. Join or renew your MLA membership at [www.mla.org/join](http://www.mla.org/join).

Chairs of departments whose ADE or ADFL member record is current by 1 June 2016 will be notified by e-mail between 15 and 30 August with instructions for registering and requesting hotel accommodations. The MLA urges hiring departments to use teleconference interviews to accommodate candidates who for reasons of expense or personal circumstance are not able to travel to the convention.



DANIEL ROOT

## It's Time to Strengthen Your Programs

Just over five years ago, the world of higher education was shaken by the news of the planned elimination of programs in several languages and in theater at the University at Albany, State University of New York. Stories about other programs at risk followed, as did outcries from educators and the public. I wrote about the shortsightedness of such cuts in this publication and in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Five years later, few stories about closed or merged programs make the front page in the higher education press. But these programs remain at risk. Proposed cuts have been announced, for example, at Rider University (Clark), at the College of Saint Rose (Bump), and at Calvin College (Delph, Bosch, and Parks). On some campuses, no

programs seem more vulnerable than those in languages other than English, and I'd like to tell you what the MLA has been doing to help.

In 2010 a working group of the MLA's Executive Council, under the leadership of 2009 MLA president Catherine Porter, began the project to develop what became the ADFL-MLA Language Consultancy Service ([adfl.mla.org/Resources/Consultancy-Service](http://adfl.mla.org/Resources/Consultancy-Service)). The service is designed to help members of the Association of Departments of Foreign Languages (ADFL) anticipate problems before they become critical. Typically, the service sends one faculty expert to visit the campus of a department requesting assistance. The consultant draws on MLA resources to provide information and advise the language program on a variety of issues (e.g., curriculum design, faculty governance, strategic planning). Consultants are faculty members with a wide range of experience in administration; many have served as program directors, chairs, and deans or held other positions in upper-level administration. During the 2014–15 academic year, faculty experts, identified and trained by the ADFL staff together with faculty members who have worked previously as consultants, visited an extraordinary variety of departments and programs ranging from small liberal arts colleges to large departments in R1 universities. The Language Consultancy Service has supported public, private, and faith-based institutions. Consultancies have been organized for single- and multilanguage departments as well as for general humanities departments that include languages at comprehensive public institutions.

The consultant spends approximately a day with the department's faculty members to discuss innovative educational trends and to address institution-specific concerns. The goal is to create ongoing and productive dialogue in the academic unit. Language Consultancy Service visits can provide effective preparation for an external review. Many departments have scheduled consultancy visits in connection with faculty retreats or with the first faculty meeting at the beginning of a new academic year. Financial support for the program is shared by the MLA and the institution requesting a consultation: the MLA pays the consultant's honorarium, and the college or university covers the costs of travel and on-site expenses.

Mark Pietralunga, chair of the Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics at Florida State University, arranged for a consultancy visit to his department at the beginning of the academic year in 2016. He reports:

The ADFL-MLA Consultancy Service provided our large and diverse academic unit with the valuable opportunity of having an independent and expert consultant assist us in exploring a wide range of short-term and long-range questions that impact our programs and students. During the visit, the consultant presented insightful data and feedback on the links between enrollments and curriculum, building majors and degree programs, recruitment, retention, careers, and post-degree pathways. Moreover, the consultancy service helped in the articulation of some overarching questions as "How to promote languages as areas of strategic emphasis?" and "How can a foreign language department make itself more vital to the University?" The visit enabled the consultant to meet not only with the general faculty but also with specific groups, including coordinators of the language subunits and directors of language programs, all of which led to an informed and productive dialogue. Equally beneficial was the follow-up data supplied by the service that addressed specific questions, strategies, and program development and growth issues that emerged during the visit. In all, the information and discussions resulting from the visit contributed greatly in allowing us to have a much clearer focus in the development and implementation of a strategic plan.

To date, the Language Consultancy Service has made twenty-seven site visits in twenty states, with at least ten more visits to come in 2016.

The recommendations of the 2007 report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages, *Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World*, which guided the creation of the consultancy, continue to function as a useful starting place for the conversation between the consultant and the department. The report proposes that all faculty members (full- and part-time) work together to structure curricular offerings so as to address a variety of needs that students experience today, recognizing that very few students will go on to graduate studies in literature. The report acknowledges the intrinsic value of language study but also argues for the necessity of thinking more about instrumental applications of language. In particular, the report challenges departments to confront and overcome curricular bifurcation along the all-too-familiar split between language and literature. The report encourages a curricular design that emphasizes culture from the beginning (literary, filmic, popular, and so on) and language to the end (including graduate studies). A program built around such offerings is both pedagogically effective and has the potential to resist the division

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of the academic workforce into non-tenure-stream faculty members at one end of the curriculum and tenure-stream faculty members at the other. Rethinking the curriculum becomes an occasion to address labor practices and faculty governance in the department. And it becomes a chance to implement change where it is needed.

Rosemary G. Feal

**Note**

I thank my colleagues Dennis Looney and Mara Naaman for their assistance with this column.

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Members are invited to comment on this column at [exccdirector.commons.mla.org](http://exccdirector.commons.mla.org).