

The Renaissance Project

1. Workshop Description:

The term "Renaissance" is largely taken to identify a period of radical innovation in humanist arts and letters. Though the chronological borders of that period shift from region to region (i.e. South to North), it is generally a given that the period of time it designates is now closed. But what if the Renaissance is best conceived, not as a historical period, but as a historical project? What if the task of the scholar and the teacher is to participate in, or even to intervene in, this project called the Renaissance?

This workshop invites literary scholars from across AALAC member institutions to engage these questions across three modalities of our work: as scholars, as teachers, and as leaders of public intellectual discourse. How might we reimagine the central goals of literary criticism if the Renaissance is not a fixed and finished period but is instead (à la Gadamer) an "unfinished event" in which the critic participates? How might the core insights and innovations of Renaissance humanism—from schoolroom exercises to the rediscovery of old and lost things, from the generative challenges of multilingualism and translation to the dynamics of imitation, emulation, and repurposing—serve as pedagogical openings for our own Renaissance classrooms? And finally, what might a public defense of the Humanities rooted in the Renaissance imagination achieve?

The proposed workshop aims to sharpen our entry into this thought experiment through a series of carefully curated presentations and conversations that will include: poetry readings, seminar discussion, formal research presentations, and a final round table. Our aim in each of these activities is to expand the range of critical practices current in the field and to encourage experimental forms of criticism that include both academic and public writing as well as pedagogical innovation.

We envision the proposed workshop as the inaugural event of what will be an ongoing and collaborative relationship across AALAC institutions, including leadership and participation from Pomona College, Scripps College, Oberlin College, Rhodes College, and Barnard College. In addition, we have budgeted below for travel and lodging for an additional four attendees from AALAC institutions, pending successful funding and final calendar.

Possible next steps include: an online archive of shared pedagogical exercises, collaborative writing projects for both public and scholarly venues, curated conference panels, and an edited collection or special issue of a peer-reviewed journal. While this first event will focus primarily on Renaissance poetry, follow-up programming may also include symposia of interdisciplinary scope (e.g. art history, history and philosophy of science, musicology, etc.). Workshop leaders and participants will have the opportunity to meet annually at national conferences where we will check in with our collective progress and plans.

It is our intention to evaluate the quality of the workshop by the quality of the work it enables. We will therefore ask each participant to select one or more contributions to the project's collective ambition to circulate critical and pedagogical innovations in the field and beyond. E.g.,

Participants may contribute pedagogical materials to an online, open-access database; participants may revise presentations for publication in a peer-review journal; participants may choose to apply for additional grants to support subsequent stages of the Renaissance Project; or, participants may submit public writing to venues ranging from *The Chronicle of Higher Education* to the *Los Angeles Review of Books*.

Pomona College is enthusiastic about hosting "The Renaissance Project": the English Department, Humanities Studio, and Dean's Office have committed funds for this event to help cover additional expenses, including: space and equipment, meals, childcare subsidies, etc.

2. Workshop Leaders:

Rachel Eisendrath, Assistant Professor of English (Barnard College)

Stephanie Elsky, Assistant Professor of English (Rhodes College)

Wendy Beth Hyman, Associate Professor of English (Oberlin College)

Tessie Prakas, Assistant Professor of English (Scripps College)

Colleen Ruth Rosenfeld, Associate Professor of English (Pomona College)

3. Designated Workshop Liaison:

Colleen Ruth Rosenfeld, Associate Professor of English (Pomona College)

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