

# Dissertation Defense: Angela Porcarelli

Tuesday, August 14  
12:30 p.m.  
Ballantine Hall,  
Room 606

## COMMITTEE IN CHARGE

**Assoc. Prof. Massimo  
Scalabrini, Chair**  
French and Italian

**Prof. Andrea Ciccarelli**  
French and Italian

**Prof. Peter Bondanella  
(Dist. Prof. Emeritus)**  
French and Italian

**Prof. Eric MacPhail**  
French and Italian



INDIANA UNIVERSITY

## LA TRADIZIONE DELLA BEFFA E LA NOVELLA DEL GRASSO LEGNAIUOLO

My dissertation investigates the theme of the beffa (ruse) and its development from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. Through an analysis of Plato's *Philebus* and Lodovico Castelvetro's commentary to Aristotle's *Poetics*, I first outline a possible definition of the comedy that characterizes the trickster motif. In particular, I focus on the cause of laughter, which, according to Plato, can be located in the malevolent attitude of the person who provokes the comic situation and of those who participate in it as spectators. Drawing on this theoretical assumption, I then trace the genealogy of the trickster topos, interpreting the beffa not as an exaltation of ingenuity, as many scholars contend, but rather as the sublimation of an aggressiveness that can become extremely violent, and beneath which lie unresolved social and cultural conflicts. I focus in particular on Boccaccio, who establishes a model for the beffa genre, and on Antonio Manetti's *Novella del Grasso legnaiuolo*. The latter presents characteristics that set it apart from the tradition of the beffa and constitutes, at the same time, a striking example of a situation where, instead of being used to celebrate the intelligence of the trickster, the victim exposes the limits and weaknesses of rationality.

