

The Department of French & Italian presents a PhD Dissertation Defense

Pantalea Mazzitello

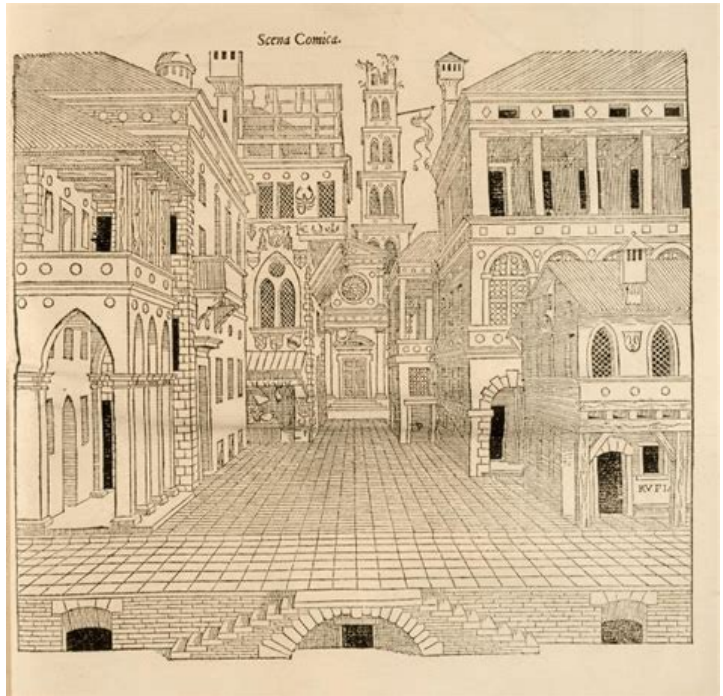
Cursing and Laughing: Blasphemy in Italian Renaissance Literature

9:00 am, Monday, May 27, 2024, on Zoom, in English

For more information, please contact Prof. Scalabrini at mscalabr@indiana.edu

This project examines the controversial topic of cursing God publicly, on stage, and in social interactions by focusing on the literary representation and interpretation of blasphemy in different genres of Renaissance Italian literature. The analysis of the literary representation of figures of blasphemers and expressions of

blasphemy reveals critical changes in the social and intellectual life of 16th-century Italy. During this period, intellectual elites began to prioritize being a good member of society over being a good Christian. As a result of these shifts, early modern Italy retained its concerns about the religious implications of blasphemy but with a growing sensitivity to its social and behavioral implications. Society was evolving with new forms of interpersonal interactions, particularly in the context of



emerging courtly and urban settings. In that context, blasphemy was not only considered reprehensible from a religious point of view, as had always been the case, but it also represented an insulting expression that did not fit into a society informed by good manners, as it was being codified in the 16th century, where “courtesy” and “gentleness in speech” were gaining crucial relevance in social interactions. Furthermore, this project uncovers humoristic and secular dimensions in the use of blasphemous utterances, a facet often overlooked in traditional scholarship focused solely on historical documentation. 16th-century Italian literature portrays a culture in which blasphemous language was employed to trivialize the divine with the intention of shocking and disrupting, where the ‘shock’ could also induce laughter by surprising the audience with an uncommon and unexpected juxtaposition of sacred and profane terms, and the ‘disruption’ primarily acted to the detriment of social and civil interactions. Ultimately, this dissertation analyzes blasphemy in literary texts to offer a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the value system underpinning social interactions and cultural and religious sensibilities in 16th-century Italy.

Committee:

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