The Department of French & Italian presents
a PhD Dissertation Defense

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Bridal Education and Virtuous Marriage: Reading Boccaccio through the Cassone Istoriato in Quattrocento Florence

Thursday, September 25, 2025, 12:00pm – 2:00 pm, via Zoom. In English.
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This dissertation examines the works of Giovanni Boccaccio in the context of the 15th-century Florentine *cassone istoriato* and its role in the moral education of brides. These chests were commissioned in pairs by a father or prospective husband in anticipation of a wedding. In *Quattrocento* Florence, *cassoni* are notable for their external panels, which are decorated with narrative paintings. The didactic purpose of the *cassone* is conveyed through these narratives; exemplary figures and cautionary tales guide elite women as they transition from virgins to wives.

This project asks how and to what end Boccaccio's works were adapted to the *cassone istoriato* format. Boccaccio's texts reveal the patriarchal expectations imposed on young women of the Florentine elite, expectations that are further reinforced in the *cassoni*. Where the page values irony and social critique, the panel favors tradition, obligation, and regulation of behavior. The stories are adapted to reflect a bride's role within her husband's household, teaching her about the repercussions of her conduct. *Cassoni* depicting violent scenes either sanitize them or deploy assault as an instructional tool. The erotic is likewise transformed. Where Boccaccian texts play with female desire, the *cassone* reduces it to its procreative function.

This dissertation is divided into three chapters, each dedicated to a wifely virtue. Chapter 1 examines the theme of marital chastity through Penelope and Lucretia in Petrarch's *Trionfo della Pudicizia*, Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris*, *Corbaccio*, and *Decameron* (II.9, X.9). Chapter 2 explores the virtues of erotic love and the influence of Venus, drawing on Boccaccio's *Genealogia deorum gentilium*, *Teseida*, *Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta*, *Decameron* (II.7, V.1) and *Ninfale Fiesolano*. Chapter 3 considers the virtue of uxorial obedience in relation to *Decameron* (V.8, X.10), in the context of the enduring myth of the Rape of the Sabines.

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