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Statement of Research Objectives

The primary focus of my research centers upon Giovanni Boccaccio's *opere 'minori'* and explores questions of intertextuality and the ways in which an author like Boccaccio uses literary models to test his readers and teach them how to approach texts with attention and a skeptic's eye. My book, titled *Boccaccio's Arboretum: Prickly Humor, Flowering Fiction*, argues that Boccaccio's minor works experiment with genre and reader expectations in ways that are meant to be both disruptive and humorous. The dominant lineage of critical literature on Boccaccio presents a narrative of the author's life in which his vernacular production reaches its apex with the *Decameron*, after which he becomes more somber and serious, switching largely to Latin and focusing more on scholarly tomes than stories to be read for pleasure. Also implicit in this narrative is the overly simple assumption that Boccaccio's minor works are at least vaguely autobiographical; his love stories are taken to be concurrent with heartache he experienced in his real life, his anti-feminine diatribes similarly a side effect of his disenchantment with a former lover. I argue that there is a more revealing critical lineage to be found in analyses of how literary humor works. As Luigi Pirandello's *L'umorismo* declares, humor dismantles the logical system of rhetoric and creates surprising and unexpected contradictions. It is necessarily complex, and it requires prior knowledge of such rhetorical conventions if it is to be understood. I demonstrate Boccaccio's many enactments of this type of *umorismo* across a variety of texts. By considering poetry and prose, vernacular and Latin, I present the reader with a guide to unpacking and enjoying Boccaccio's minor works, one that will also be helpful to those reading texts not discussed within my book. After submitting a proposal and meeting with the Acquisitions Editor, I was invited to submit the manuscript to the University of Toronto Press in June of 2017, where it is currently under review.

Additionally, I am revising a chapter of the book ('Lasciva comperias immixta sacris': Persevering through thorns in *De mulieribus claris*) for publication as an article, forthcoming next year. I work closely with Boccaccio's puzzling, fascinating and elusive compendium *De mulieribus claris* in confronting the problem of Boccaccio and women, a conversation that Boccaccio scholarship in the U.S. continues to cultivate in ever more thoughtful ways. Boccaccio's oeuvre presents the careful reader with a multifaceted and at times contradictory viewpoint on the intellectual and moral status of women. His depiction of his hundreds of female characters varies in style and tone, making it exceedingly challenging to pin down the author's 'true' position on gender. While both the *De mulieribus claris* and the *Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta* are open about how the writing has been adjusted in certain ways for the benefit of female readers, the material is presented in a way that demands active, close, critical reading. Ultimately, I argue, Boccaccio carves out a definitive, powerful place for women in the world of literature. I am taking the article slightly farther than the book chapter goes in examining traces of readership in the *De mulieribus* tradition, with the help of Harvard's Houghton collection and the availability therein of several early print editions of vernacular translations of the text.

My current teaching assignment at Harvard has allowed me to work with contemporary literature and poetry, as well, and I am putting the finishing touches on an article on lies, deception and coming of age in the Elena Ferrante's *L'amica geniale*. Additionally, the course I am teaching this fall (Centuries of Migration in Italian Literature) confronts questions of identity and Italianness in contemporary Italy, about which I will be presenting a paper at NeMLA's 2018 convention in Pittsburgh (titled "Approaching Migration Through Currents of 'italianità'"). This course has prompted many questions from students about what literary criticism is and what it can do in the world. The reason I do the work I do is that I think the texts I study and assign are worth reading, and they are worth reading more closely and with more attention, scrutiny and receptivity. My objective across all the periods I study is to make visible what has been overlooked, as well as to create more openness and inclusion in the study of literature without sacrificing any of its rigor or precision.