

# Arcangela Tarabotti. Antisatire: In Defense of Women, against Francesco Buoninsegni. Edited and translated by Elissa B. Weaver

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**Arcangela Tarabotti. *Antisatire: In Defense of Women, against Francesco Buoninsegni*. Edited and translated by Elissa B. Weaver. *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: The Toronto Series*, 70. Toronto: Iter Press, 2020. Pp. xiv + 114. ISBN 9780866986229.**

*Antisatire*, a short yet remarkable treatise written by Arcangela Tarabotti in 1644 (29), is a direct response to Francesco Buoninsegni's discourse made in 1632, entitled *Contro 'l lusso donnesco Satira menippea* (*Against the Vanities of women, a Menippean Satire*) (1). Knowing that she had the ability to voice her opinions because she had recently published *Paradiso monacale* and *Soliloquio* (15), Tarabotti did not lose the opportunity to write her defense. Today, the nun's showpiece has a unique place in the heart of a collection that makes the body of the seventeenth-century treatises on the question of the sexes, better known as *La Querelle des Femmes*. In her newest edition and translation, Elissa B. Weaver brings to light the socio-political and cultural aspects of *Antisatire* by curating and reviving it for a modern audience.

Weaver opens this edition of *Antisatire* with an introduction in four parts, where she informs the readers about the socio-politics of Venice shortly before Tarabotti's treatise was written (1–28). The introduction commences with a brief section entitled “A Strong Voice in Defense of Women,” where Weaver gives the necessary information to familiarize the reader with Francesco Buoninsegni's intellectual *milieu*. This, in turn, states the political ambience in which the respective two treatises, *Satira* and *Antisatire*, were written (1–3). Weaver then dedicates the second part of her introduction to Tarabotti's biography, entitling it “The Protagonists of the Debate” (3–12). In this part, she answers the fundamental questions on the reasons why the nun became a prominent and brilliant writer, as Giovan Francesco Loredan, one of her many admirers, expressed it “the world has become a theatre of marvels of your pen!” (7). Weaver then explains further how Tarabotti's confinement to a convent prompted the beginning of her activism and developed into representing her as one of the faces who embodies the fight for women's freedom of choice, and education. The third part of the introduction is dedicated to *Satira* and *Antisatire* (13–23). The translator provides the readers with various historical notes and details that explain the way in which the two discourses came to light, the rhetorical figures and strategies employed by their respective authors, and the involvement of powerful and prominent historical figures that contributed to the publishing of the two treatises. The fourth and final part of the introduction talks about the reception of *Antisatire*, which was filled

with mixed reactions by seventeenth-century Venetian readers and intellectuals (23–28).

This newest edition of *Antisatire* succeeds in giving its audience an authentic reading experience of the discourse, first, because of the informative introduction which places the readers in the corridors of seventeenth-century gender politics, and second, because Weaver bases her translation on the two published editions of the treatise (29). Arcangela Tarabotti published her *Antisatire* along with Francesco Buoninsegni's *Satira*, transforming the two treatises into a dialogue. The first version of *Antisatire* was published anonymously in 1644, at Tarabotti's request, and the second under her name and with revisions, making the two editions known as 1644 V1 and 1644 V2 (29). Weaver opens her translation with the original 1644 frontispiece (30–31), followed by the "Dedications and Printer's Note" (32–36), Francesco Buoninsegni's *Against the Vanities of Women, a Menippean Satire* (37–57), and Arcangela Tarabotti's *Antisatire* (58–93). In her translation, Weaver stays true to the style of each author, and explains every reference made in her footnotes. Francesco Buoninsegni's discourse is made in jest and aimed at a feminine audience, ridiculing and demeaning their senses and expenses of fashion and vanity. Not only does he rely on references from common works of literature to make his arguments, but he also puts to use rhetoric strategies that offend women's morality and intelligence, as he writes, "[t]he head of a woman is not what we see on her neck [...] a head truly wooden [...] mined by human greed in the bowels of hell at the expense of so many lives [...]" (47).

Tarabotti's *Antisatire* is a direct response to the semi-serious misogynistic discourse, and to Buoninsegni himself. The genius of Tarabotti creates a marriage between the two treatises by answering each of Buoninsegni's arguments all the while relying on rich literary sources and employing the same rhetoric techniques. When compared, one notices that *Antisatire* is significantly longer than *Satira*, a fact that demonstrates the richness of the nun's work, and while Buoninsegni wrote his discourse with a playful and ignorant spirit, Tarabotti adopted a serious, philosophical, and political way of thinking in her response. Weaver successfully captures Tarabotti's blunt and direct tone, who unapologetically points out the extravagant men's fashion of the time, as she writes, "[i]f you could bring yourself to be truthful, you would not joke so liberally making fun of women and their wigs [...] when many men [...] today transgress wearing abundant hair for which they have paid real cash" (74). The treatise also answers questions about education, intelligence, and the gender role and discourses of seventeenth-century Venice.

In her newest edition and translation of *Antisatire*, Weaver brings to life the reality of gender politics in seventeenth-century Venice, by capturing the styles and tones of the authors in question and adapting them for a modern audience. Moreover, she also transforms this slim volume into a resourceful academic point of reference, by enlightening the readers with the historical details on which *Satira* and *Antisatire* are based, and by including prototype photos of women's and men's fashions of the time as a visual aid to help explain further the arguments of the treatises.

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