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Sumillera, Rocio G. Invention: The Language of English Renaissance Poetics

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Sumillera, Rocio G.

Invention: The Language of English Renaissance Poetics.

Legenda. Cambridge, UK: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2019. Pp. ix, 159. ISBN 978-1-7818-8320-4 (hardcover) £75.

This much-needed book is a comprehensive and thoroughly researched chronological overview of the concept of the invention of topics (*inventio*) in poetry, as it was originally understood in classical rhetoric, that lies at the heart of Renaissance theories of imitation as individual composition. It expands the meaning and usage of invention in the Renaissance by closely linking it with the ideas of imitation and the creative imagination. It maps the history of poetic invention as the source of literary practice in the long early modern period. Rocio Sumillera writes clearly, fluidly, and above all persuasively about a complex notion that appears to be stable and uncontentious but that, in fact, as the author shows, has been the subject of redefinition since Aristotle. In the Renaissance, the idea behind the term “invention” proved to be fluid. Sumillera demonstrates this evolution through reference to an impressive range of western and northwestern Renaissance poetic theories and treatises, and he draws illuminating connections between theoretical and creative works as well as theories and writers. As Sumillera points out, invention and imitation were at times considered to be interchangeable terms. Yet as this book repeatedly shows, rhetoricians, logicians, and poets showed ingenious efforts to clarify the nuances that bring invention and imitation close together.

The introduction begins by defining invention as “a mental capacity” required for “devising” (1) a new literary text. The complex history that tries to explain how this understanding enabled poetic creation also reveals the challenges, because individual poets had their own ways of adapting invention to their own distinguishing results.

The first chapter covers the literary history of invention from the classical period to the Middle Ages, when the connection between the classical concept of invention and poetry was first made. The chapter interprets how the close connection of invention as part of the discussion of grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic in the works of Cicero and Quintilian reached the Middle Ages, where Boethius initially transformed this classical rhetorical basis of invention into a theory of poetic creation based on rhetoric and logic only.

The second chapter analyzes how Trebizond and Valla deepened the process of transforming the classical idea of invention by exploring invention within the theoretical systems of logic and rhetoric. The book covers familiar ground on this topic. However, the additional value of Sumillera's account lies in its comparative method, which addresses the English material (especially well covered in the book), alongside neo-Latin, French, Spanish, and Italian sources. In this chapter, as well as throughout the remaining three chapters and the conclusion, the author goes into more depth explaining how theory informs the writing of poetry. This chapter is an ideal starting point for anyone interested in learning about the historical context in which the English rhetorical treatises responded to the debate about invention as a rhetorical technique: the key names, major works, and principal ideas concerning oratory and imitation as invention are neatly brought together in several pages. The references to poets and their works are carefully chosen to illustrate how the new poetics of invention worked in practice, but the lack of in-depth analyses of select passages from literary texts showing that practice in the process of its creation leaves room to demonstrate how theory was reflected in, or resisted by, literary practice. This book is a history of literary theory, however, and not a study of literary criticism, so the absence of close analysis represents an invitation for further critical scholarship. Sumillera offers two instances of criticism, both using Shakespeare's sonnets as a case study, that effectively model the interplay of theory and close reading.

Chapter 3 elaborates the discussion of the rhetorical basis of imitation by introducing the concept of the "model," a key component in the historical theory of imitation. Yet the first meanings of "model" as structure, form, or construction bring this term closer to how it was understood by writers who "modelled" their writing when they imitated other writers for style and structure. Chapter 4 looks at invention as "an indicator of the lifelike quality" (80) not just of poetry but of imaginary fiction as well. The subtle connections between the period's rhetorical writing, emblematic literature and its visual accompaniment, and the poetics of translation are convincingly presented. Chapter 5 explores how the concept of the creative imagination became a virtue in new writing about poetic theory; and how theorists of invention started focusing on fiction and fables. The author makes good use of Dryden's neoclassicism as an illustration of the seventeenth-century notion of using earlier models in new writing.

The Conclusion is devoted to a brief explanation of the connection between early modern theories of creative imagination and its conceptualization in the Romantic period. The author demonstrates an organic link between these two periods within this long history, making this a good way to end the book. One question lingers: To what extent did *inventio* also become one of the resources of the neoclassical style of writing, or *elocutio* (style), especially among playwrights in the age of Shakespeare?

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Tarabotti, Arcangela.

***Antisatire: In Defense of Women, against Francesco Buoninsegni*. Ed. and trans. Elissa B. Weaver.**

The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: The Toronto Series 70 / Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 564. Toronto: Iter Press / Tempe: ACMRS Press, 2020. Pp. xiv, 114. ISBN 978-0-86698-622-9 (paperback) US\$41.95.

Throughout the years, Elissa Weaver has devoted great intellectual energy and numerous publications to the rediscovery of Arcangela Tarabotti (1604–52), the Venetian nun who powerfully critiqued the patriarchal ideology of her times, particularly the practice of forced monachization. In 1997, Weaver gathered a formidable group of scholars at the University of Chicago for the conference “Arcangela Tarabotti: A Literary Nun in Baroque Venice,” which provided the basis for the volume by the same title that she edited in 2006 (Ravenna: Longo Editore). Even more relevant to this review is her publication of the first modern edition of Francesco Buoninsegni and Arcangela Tarabotti’s *Satira e antisatira* in 1998 (Rome: Salerno). Twenty-two years later, Weaver now provides the English edition and translation of these same texts, furthering Tarabotti’s relevance in the Anglophone world. A comparison of the Italian and the English editions highlights the progress that the study of Tarabotti has made, thanks of course to Weaver herself, to some of her former students—such as Lynn Westwater and Meredith Ray—and to other scholars who have tackled various facets of Tarabotti’s literary persona and made her texts widely available.