

Book Review

Isotta Nogarola's Defense of Eve

Boyle (F.P.), Chapman (S.A.), Goud (D.),
Hendrickson (T.G.), Karmali (S.), Leininger (K.),
Stern (J.A.), Wilson-Bivera (A.). Pp. v + 106.
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Isotta Nogarola (1418 to 1466) was an Italian humanist who, in 1451, composed her most well-known work, the *Defense of Eve* (*De pari aut impari Evae atque Adae peccato*). As a result of a debate with Ludovico Foscarini, Nogarola answers the question of whether Adam or Eve sinned more gravely by mounting a sustained defence of Eve, thereby challenging a long-standing tradition which, from Tertullian to Boccaccio, had placed primary responsibility for original sin on her.

Thomas G. Hendrickson and his students at Stanford Online High School have published a new edition of the *Defense of Eve*, which includes running vocabulary, grammatical explanations, and a glossary of commonly occurring words in Latin. Its main aim is to enable Latin students to read the text in its original language. Building on the first and, until now, only critical edition of the work, that of Eugenius Abel (1886), Hendrickson's team has collated additional manuscripts and proposed several new readings.

The edition is preceded by a chapter summary and a substantial introductory study written by Hendrickson, which offers a clear contextualisation of the work and its author, discusses the most relevant cultural themes, highlights key linguistic features of humanist Latin, and traces the textual history of the *Defense*. This introduction is written in an exceptionally clear and pedagogical manner, allowing any reasonably advanced Latin student to approach complex topics such as the history of Latin language or the practice of textual criticism without feeling overwhelmed. Chapter and paragraph divisions as well as punctuation are helpful and make it easy to contrast with Abel's edition, if desired.

One of the major strengths of this volume is the way it invites readers to discover other, often neglected, yet fascinating texts. References to the correspondence between Isotta Nogarola and her interlocutor in the debate, Ludovico Foscarini, encourage readers to explore a wider corpus of humanist letters and to situate the *Defense of Eve* within a broader intellectual exchange. The edition

also introduces abstract and complicated concepts – such as culpability, authority, and tradition – that naturally lend themselves to classroom discussion and the cultivation of an atmosphere of genuinely educated debate.

Another pedagogical virtue of the book lies in its rich inter-textual web. Hendrickson's notes and introduction bring in a range of Latin authors who are rarely encountered in secondary education, including figures such as Peter of Poitiers, Peter Lombard, and Tertullian. By foregrounding these voices, the volume can be used to show students how theological and philosophical traditions are constructed and can be challenged and reinterpreted over time precisely through careful reading and reasoned debate. At the same time, the continuous engagement with the Latin text makes the book an excellent tool for systematic review of grammar and syntax, ensuring that students not only are exposed to ideas but also actively work with the language itself.

From a scholarly perspective, the project of collaboratively producing a new edition of a relatively inaccessible work – less well known in part because it is written by a woman and has been difficult to obtain – has value that goes beyond its immediate didactic aims. It contributes fresh knowledge to the academic community by revisiting Abel's 19th-century *editio princeps* in light of new manuscript evidence and by offering a more approachable format for both teachers and students. As a matter of fact, 'a new critical edition of the *Defense of Eve* is needed, one in which the text is totally reconstituted based on new readings from all the now-known manuscripts, but such a project would be outside of the scope of a student reader. Two of the co-editors of the *Experrecta* series (Hendrickson and Pisarello) are working on a new critical edition' (p. 19). The need for such a volume is underscored by the situation in Spanish: The only existing Spanish translation of the *Defense of Eve* does not derive from the original in Latin, but from an Italian translation of the *editio princeps*, prepared by Nogarola's great-nephew, who recast the work as a Ciceronian dialogue.

Finally, this publication clearly responds to an urgent need in the field of classical and humanist studies: the lack of accessible Latin texts written by women for use in the classroom. Although a previous edition of the *Defense of Eve* was available, its more than 100 pages of Latin in its introduction made it daunting for most students. By contrast, Hendrickson's volume offers a more manageable alternative, making it far easier to integrate Nogarola's voice into courses on Latin language, Renaissance humanism, and the history of women's writing. This volume – and the whole *Experrecta* series – is truly a great source of inspiration for Classics teachers; not only does it deepen students' knowledge of Latin, but it also allows them to create something meaningful. I cannot imagine a better way to approach education.

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