Jan Machielsen


Jan Machielsen's *Martin Delrio. Demonology and Scholarship in the Counter-Reformation* (2015) is a tour de force. It sheds new light on the career of the Spanish-Flemish Jesuit, Martin Delrio (1551–1608), the renowned author of *Disquisitionum magicarum libri sex* (1599–1600). Details concerning Delrio's life and works have been largely based on an early biography, composed shortly after his death, by one of his disciples, the Jesuit Heribert Rosweyde. Since then, scholarship concerning Delrio has rarely transcended the hagiographical estimation of contemporaries. The best contributions have come from current historical research made in the field of Jesuit studies and intellectual history. Otherwise, historians of early modern scholarship have examined Delrio's life in the shadow of the relationships he maintained with the triumvirate of the late sixteenth-century Republic of Letters: Justus Lipsius, Joseph Scaliger, and Isaac Casaubon. For this reason, Machielsen's emphasis on Delrio's self-fashioning strategies and his meticulous reconstruction of Delrio's trajectory as a Spanish subject who himself participated in the political context of the Low Countries during the Eighty Years' War (1568–1648) is a major contribution.

Machielsen's book is, above all, a significant history of Counter-Reformation scholarly culture. Through a dynamic portrait, Machielsen explains how Delrio transitioned from being a humanist expert in classics to a demonologist seeking fame as a Jesuit theologian. Nor does he neglect Delrio's wider context, both personal and political. For example, Machielsen demonstrates how the Delrio family's support of the Spanish king during the war and Delrio's personal relationship with Lipsius—a recent convert to Catholicism—were crucial for positioning himself within the Jesuit Order and the European Republic of Letters. Indeed, rather than isolating Delrio's scholarly practices from his multi-faceted career, Machielsen suggests their interdependence within the broader context
of Counter-Reformation scholarly culture. Moreover, by reconsidering the work of the demonologist in connection with European Tridentine Catholicism, Machielsen explores the political and philosophical boundaries of late Renaissance humanism. In so doing, he contributes to groundbreaking research that is reevaluating Catholic contributions to the early modern history of ideas.

Machielsen's methodology is based on a meticulous reading of Delrio's works, a witty use of his scholarly correspondence, and an up-to-date bibliography that bridges often disparate disciplines, such as Jesuit studies and the history of witchcraft. The author's allusions to Delrio's travels through the Iberian Peninsula and Europe are useful to explain how the Jesuit contributed to shaping demonology as a learned discipline through a transnational approach. In addition, Machielsen shows how Delrio's systematic and legal evaluation of forms of heresy leads him to draw a line between heresy and credulity, while reexamining the very nature and value of faith testimony. As Machielsen explains, in a period driven by doubts, Delrio's mindset as a demonologist and a classical humanist were entangled within the skeptical context of the late Renaissance.

Machielsen's attention to details related to Delrio's family—merchants involved with Antwerp's Spanish community—and their ties with the Spanish monarchy are also fundamental for understanding the role that scholarly friendships and Jesuit acquaintances played in the political and cultural context of the Catholic Reformation. As Machielsen points out, the fact that the Spanish Crown never intentionally sought to forge a supranational scholarly elite within this monarchy invites reflection on how Delrio's family background, and his aversion to the Dutch War of Independence, fostered the political dimension of his scholarly trajectory. In view of the fact that the history of ideas is too often disconnected from the realm of political history, Machielsen's highlighting of this political significance is further developed by his examination of Delrio's friendships with scholars and political intermediaries within the international conglomerate of territories formed by the Spanish monarchy. Delrio's contacts with the Jesuit Andreas Schott—himself a scholarly collaborator of Lipsius—and with Lorenzo Ramirez de Prado, son of a minister of King Philip III who was associated with the learned circle of Salamanca University, connected Delrio with the political culture of this monarchy. Machielsen explores how these relationships overlapped with state politics, as well as how they were conditioned by relations of patronage fostered by the composite nobilities of the Spanish monarchy, whose families were often divided between the court of the Catholic king, and territories which were part, or direct neighbors, of the Spanish monarchy.