

Jan Machielsen, *Martin Delrio: Demonology and Scholarship in the Counter-Reformation* (PhD University of Oxford 2011; British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship Monographs; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, x + 441 pp., ISBN 978 0 19 726580 2).

Jan Machielsen has pushed disenchantment to the extreme. The subject of his book is Martin Delrio SJ (1551-1608), a prominent demonologist of the late sixteenth century, born from Spanish parents in Flanders. At least since the appearance of Stuart Clark's *Thinking with Demons* (1997), we are aware that understanding the occurrence of demons and witches in early modern thought requires a sophisticated grasp of the interlocking discursive modes of theology, natural philosophy and medicine of the period. The cliché of women being the victims of mass hysteria, brutally tortured and unjustly convicted by male judicial officials, does little to foster insight in the subtle speculations of scholars such as Jean Bodin (1530-1596) and Reginald Scot (1538-1599). Rather than the instigators of evil malpractice, they were theoreticians who employed the vocabulary of witchcraft for various intellectual purposes.

Machielsen takes this sobering view one step further. Delrio's *Disquisitionum magicarum libri sex* (1599-1600), on witchcraft and superstition, enjoyed considerable success throughout the early modern period. Its print history in fact eclipsed the dissemination of more widely known works such as Heinrich Kramer's *Malleus maleficarum* (1487) and Bodin's *Démonomanie* (1580). Machielsen reads Delrio's book on witchcraft entirely as an expression of the Jesuit's pursuit of recognition among fellow humanist scholars. It was Delrio's instrument of 'self-fashioning', a term Machielsen uses repeatedly (e.g. 17, 211) without losing himself in potentially distracting methodological discussions. Demonology served Delrio to show off his skills as a textual scholar. To substantiate that point, Machielsen has devoted a mere quarter of the book to Delrio's demonological output. The rest of the book discusses Delrio's other philological projects (as well as his biography). The Jesuit figures as a classical scholar, editing Senecan tragedy, and as a theologian, engaging with biblical exegesis, patristics and church history. Especially Delrio's work on Seneca receives ample treatment. As Machielsen puts it, '(t)he risk, of course, is that the present volume takes on the appearance of a sandwich: demonological filling squeezed between two sections of dry bread' (19). At no point during the reading of the book, a sandwich came to mind. But the implicit warning does touch upon the legitimate question whether this procedure results in the most arresting setting for the monographic study of an early modern demonologist.

The first part of the book treats Delrio's life story. Rather than biographical, these chapters are thematic in structure, subsuming episodes of Delrio's life under a succession of 'identities'. Machielsen treats Delrio's brief administrative career in the Southern Netherlands during the chaotic years following the Sack of Antwerp as a traumatic experience, which stimulated his decision to abandon secular life and champion the cause of religion. His entry into the Society of Jesus forced him to learn to negotiate the hierarchical relations within the order, operating in all circumstances under the veil of obedience. He mastered this skill successfully enough to become an admired academic, teaching in Leuven, Valladolid and Salamanca. In that capacity he developed a friendship with Justus Lipsius – even if the concept of 'friendship' had peculiar connotations in this context, being more instrumental to the friends' public interests than we would nowadays care to acknowledge. Both Lipsius and Delrio stood to gain by their friendship: Lipsius saw the credibility of his reconversion to Catholicism boosted, while Delrio could bask in the glory of the preeminent humanist of the period.

The second part of the book turns to Delrio the classical scholar. Machielsen discusses the slightly delicate issue of a member of the Counter Reformation vanguard exerting himself in editing and commenting a pagan author. On the one hand the Jesuit educational system incorporated enough of the humanist culture to allow one of their members to embark on such a project. On the other hand a careful comparison of Delrio's juvenile work (*Adversaria*), and the results of his study after entry into the Society (*Syntagma*), reveals how he subtly reworked the project to conform to Counter Reformation strictures. Machielsen then goes on to examine a succession of philological themes: Delrio's discussion of the identity of the author of the Senecan tragedies, a complex philological issue still contested today; Delrio's method of emending source texts, always based on manuscript evidence, never on conjecture, which after all resembled the diabolic act of divination; and Delrio's consideration of the historicity of the content of the tragedies he edited. The issue of the historicity of Medea, in fact, serves as a bridge to the topic most people would want to pick up a biography of Delrio for: his demonological ideas.

The third part of the book starts with the context which made Delrio write a book on witchcraft: certainly no judicial responsibilities, but rather an urge to participate in one of the most acute – and hence fashionable – discussions of the day. The author of the *Disquisitiones* was not only topical in his choice of subject matter, but also in his methodology. In line with some of the major projects of the Counter Reformation – the theology of Mechior Cano organised around biblical commonplaces, Cesare Baronio's monumental history of the church based on source fragments – Delrio also established demonology as a textual discipline. Machielsen shows how, even if the Jesuit loosely employed thomistic categories for his taxonomy of demonic interventions, the foundation of his work were historical examples rather

than the logical deductions of scholasticism. The resulting pastiche of ancient and modern sources – quite typical of late humanist scholarship, one should add – procured him his reputation as an expert in the science of witchcraft. But, as Machielsen shows, the moment Delrio was called upon to put his expertise to use, his demonology turned out to be impracticable. It found no application in actual cases of witchcraft suspects. In the end, according to Machielsen, this would turn out to be an asset rather than a disadvantage. In subsequent decades, his ‘disembodied’ demonology would appeal to new generations, who may have rejected the judicial abuses of witch persecution, but who were eager to continue demonological speculations.

In the final chapters Machielsen turns to Delrio’s theological endeavours. Delrio tried his hand at biblical exegesis, composing Marian homilies and commenting the Song of Songs – both projects requiring poetic skills and belonging to confessionally contested territory. He also engaged in the mud-slinging which was typical of early modern scholarship: the question of the historicity of pseudo-Dionysius was occasion for him and Joseph Justus Scaliger, the star of the Protestant university of Leiden, to vilify each other publicly for a protracted period of time. Again, in his theological work as much as in his classical scholarship and his demonology, Delrio tried his hand at the most recent developments, showcasing his skills as a philologist and a historian.

In this admirable study, there is one thing which remains unsatisfying. Machielsen seems to have struggled to recover a consistent pattern in Delrio’s scholarly output, even if he protests in the introduction that we should not try to impose a single motive on the actions of humans of the past. It is the ‘self-fashioning’ of a late-humanist scholar which shapes Machielsen’s interpretative framework. In the case of Delrio, this required a balancing act between the dynamics of international philological scholarship, Jesuit loyalty and Counter Reformation piety. Yet it would seem that more could have been made of the specific mould in which Delrio fashioned himself.

In the first part Machielsen produces the compelling image of an ambitious magistrate whose career was frustrated because of the political vicissitudes ensuing from the Reformation. In response Delrio staged himself as a partisan in an all-encompassing war of the faithful against the heretics. The scholarly career which Machielsen subsequently traces, does reflect a progression from the secular studies of Delrio’s youth (the pagan Seneca), through the intermediary stage of demonology, to the lofty heights of theological subject matter. Nevertheless, if the cause of the Church of Rome came to occupy such a central place in the image which Delrio cast of himself and the world around him, it might be expected that in his demonological work as well as in his theological studies his self-fashioning would have been conditioned by the interests of the sacred cause he served – more so than emerges from the present volume. While Machielsen shows us much of the intricacies of the scholarly world in which Delrio manoeuvred, the

confessional struggle in which he participated fades into the background. Only in the last chapter, when Scaliger enters the fray, do the confessional implications of scholarship move centre stage. More in general, the emphasis Machielsen puts on Delrio's textual methods runs the risk of swamping the specificity of the Jesuit's otherworldly interests in the intricacies of philological craftsmanship.

Apart from this reservation, the book is undeniably a great achievement, dense with facts and rigorously structured. Machielsen's erudition is apparent in the ease with which he discusses anything from the disentanglement of the ancient authors named Seneca to the medieval epistemology of superstition – and it shows in the exuberant footnotes. The book is to be commended to everyone interested in demonology, the history of the Jesuits, the Counter Reformation, and scholarship in the transitional period from the Renaissance to the Scientific Revolution.

Jetze Touber, Utrecht University