

STEFANIA TUTINO. *Shadows of Doubt: Language and Truth in Post-Reformation Catholic Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. Pp. xi, 278. \$78.00.

Stefania Tutino presents readers with an exceptionally incisive, sophisticated, and readable exposition of hitherto neglected aspects of early modern Catholic culture. In a nutshell, she finds truth in doubt. Tutino acknowledges the tension between language and reality as “a fundamental and constitutive element of our current intellectual horizon” (3) and makes it the focus of her inquiry into early modern thought. Putting on “a pair of self-aware and self-conscious postmodernist glasses” (3), she is able to identify layers of uncertainty concerning the relationship between reality, language, and truth that point to a “darker” side of early modern Catholic thought. This is an area of Catholic intellectual endeavor characterized by doubt and disruption rather than by doctrinal certainty and confidence in language as a vessel of secular and divine truth. It does not easily fit into prevalent views of post-Reformation Catholicism, and it is much closer to postmodern epistemological and hermeneutical concerns than we tend to assume. Tutino convincingly establishes epistemological anxiety and sensitivity as something (post)modern historians share, to a degree, with early modern Catholic theologians.

Many of the authors discussed in *Shadows of Doubt: Language and Truth in Post-Reformation Catholic Culture* are not among the *Gipfelstürmer* of the early modern Republic of Letters. One of the many merits of the book is that it puts the spotlight on some of the intellectual foot soldiers and near outcasts of early modern Catholicism. To label them as such is by no means derogatory. These are inquiring individuals who engaged with salient issues and sought to answer difficult questions with unflinching honesty. If they did not achieve lasting fame, they are distinguished by intelligence and intellectual courage nonetheless.

The first of five chapters follows a brief yet highly instructive introduction and invites readers to re-visit the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century debate about equivocation and moral reservation. Tutino engages with some well-known participants in that debate—Domingo de Soto, Martín de Azpilcueta, Leonard Lessius, Robert Persons, and Théophile Raynaud among them. These authors regarded mental reservation and equivocation as a useful strategy when it came to reconciling absolute certainties with the need to operate in difficult circumstances. Tutino brings to the fore their underlying sense not just of the contextual malleability of truth, but of the ambiguity of language itself and of its tenuous relationship with reality.

The second and third chapters take the inquiry into early modern doubts concerning the capability of language to reflect reality and speak truth into the field of historiography. The ex-Jesuit Agostino Mascardi (1590–1640) and his *Dell'arte historica* (1636) are the focus of chapter 2. Mascardi insisted on historiography as narrative and as the mediator between events that happened in the past and readers receiving the narrative in the present. His reflections—not least his contention that the past is only really transmitted once a reader has gained “memory” and “understanding”—betray an “embryonic doubt” (73) about the historian’s ability to bridge the distance between the reader and the past.

This same embryonic doubt also affected the writing of divine history. In her third chapter, Tutino contrasts Cesare Baronio’s ambition to make history the handmaiden of theological doctrine with contemporary doubts concerning the ability to condense human action and divine will into historical narrative. Her protagonist is another ex-Jesuit, Paolo Beni (ca. 1552–1625). Beni shared with Mascardi an intellectual milieu far removed from the official circles of post-Reformation Rome. He explicitly criticized Baronio’s project on the grounds that the tension between reality and language made it simply impossible to find the true church and divine truth in human life and history, or in fact write ecclesiastical history at

all. While his intellectual stance branded him as something of an outcast in his own time, Beni, again, shows how early modern thinkers can prefigure postmodern concerns about the epistemological value of historical narrative.

The fourth chapter engages with Pedro Juan Perpiñán (1530–1566) and Famiano Strada (1572–1649), two eminent Jesuit professors of rhetoric at the Roman College. Both sought to revive Ciceronian rhetoric not just as a model of style and a means to communicate Christian truth. They also understood and developed it as a tool and strategy that would allow the individual to acknowledge as well as negotiate the volatility and uncertainty that, in their view, defined the world of men generally, and especially the relationship between human language and human truth.

The fifth and final chapter advances ever more deeply into this relationship. It also brings the argument back to the initial discussion of the radical hermeneutical and epistemological implications of doctrines of mental reservation and equivocation. Tutino takes her cue from Paolo Prodi's notion of the oath as "sacrament of power" and Giorgio Agamben's interpretation of the oath as increasingly fragile verification of facts in words. Revisiting Soto, Francisco Suárez, and Lessius, she can show that the demise of the oath as sacrament of language and the concomitant rise as sacrament of (secular) power started in the early modern period. She confirms, again, that not only intellectuals at the margins of early modern Catholicity acknowledged how precarious the link between language, truth, and reality was, but some of the most prominent theologians did too, and sought to negotiate rather than deny its volatility.

*Shadows of Doubt* represents an outstanding contribution to early modern scholarship in every respect. It recovers aspects of post-Reformation Catholicism that are integral to our understanding of the period, yet have far too long languished in oblivion. Tutino brings the present closer to the past. This greater familiarity with a distant past does not come at the

price of anachronistic blurring of boundaries, though. It is the result of a conceptually refined and methodologically grounded understanding of the past that allows the reader to reflect critically on salient issues of our time.

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