

Italian Academy Fall 08 Seminar: Abstract

"The Diplomat's Dog: The Natural World of Papal Nuncio Girolamo Rorario and how his *Quod animalia* (1544) Framed Enlightenment-Era Debates on Animal Rationality"

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This working paper sought to meld the Academy's 2008 themes of cultural transmission and neuroscience with my current, broader research on diplomatic mobility in sixteenth-century Europe. In both paper and presentation, I emphasized the importance of mobility and diplomatic experience in the authorship and transmission of an important early treatise on animal rationality, former papal nuncio Girolamo Rorario's 1544 *Quod animalia saepe ratione utantur melius Homine* [That Animals Frequently Use Reason Better Than Men]. The treatise circulated in limited manuscript copy among Rorario's friends and patrons for nearly a century, before its title caught the eye of French bibliophile and embassy secretary Gabriel Naudé. Naudé carried a copy of the *Quod animalia* home from Rome to Paris, where he had it published in 1648. Enjoying a surprising popularity in the "Republic of Letters", the volume and its subsequent editions sparked and framed debates between Descartes, Pierre Bayle, Leibniz, Christian Wolff, and other seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century natural philosophers on the rational capacities of animals.

Though treated by its seventeenth-century and modern readers as a rather weak natural philosophical treatise, I argued that Rorario's *Quod animalia* should rather be read as a moralizing political text, in the context of its author's diplomatic experience, political allegiances, social aspirations, and broader, pedagogical approach to the natural world -- an approach evidenced in a series of archivally-preserved letters between Rorario and his family, artistic clients, and steward. My presentation gave particular attention to these letters as they described Rorario's attempts to shape his natural environment, through horticultural improvements "come quello d[i] Roma" at his villa near Pordenone in Friuli, through the instruction of his children, and through patronage of the local artist Il Pordenone.