CHAPTER SEVEN

THE JESUIT SUBTEXT

While *El Criticón*’s political commentary proves relatively accessible to modern readers, the issue of Jesuit influence in the text remains more obscure. Perhaps due to its apparent invisibility, the question of the impact of the Society of Jesus looms fairly large in criticism of Gracián’s *œuvre*, leading some to posit a uniquely Jesuit style in Gracián’s work.¹ Benito Pelegrín, for example, argues for a connection between Jesuit style and the artifice associated with the Baroque by contextualizing Gracián’s highly adorned style as a deliberate reaction against the classicism of the Jansenists.² He then connects Gracián’s rhetorical style with Jesuit theological positions.³

After Gracián’s assiduous cultivation of secularity over moral purposes in his relationship to the didactic tradition, any mention of religious content seems contradictory; however, such contradictions formed part of many Jesuits’ literary production. As Yasmin Annabel Haskell affirms in her study of Jesuit didactic poetry, many seemingly secular texts written by members of the Society of Jesus also commented on the Jesuit experience. For example, in analyzing the garden verses of René Rapin, S. J., Haskell observes: “But we shall find that the poem, so secular in appearance, is motivated by religious and Jesuito-political impulses every bit as much as by literary and cultural – even if the former is

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³ Pelegrín, *Éthique et Esthétique*, pp. 146–80. Pelegrín also writes at length about the rhetorical effects of casuistry in the introduction to his French translation of *Agudeza y arte de ingenio*, pp. 44–54. Batllori labels Pelegrín’s "transposition of casuistry and probabilism from morality to rhetoric" as "curious" and believes that this shift places too much emphasis on these two concepts. Batllori, *Baltasar Gracián i el Barroc* (València: Tres i Quatre, 1996), p. 512.
concealed under a mild, *mondain* exterior not unlike the one presented by the poet-priest himself.”

*El Criticón*’s presentation of theology, however, serves to further explain the inclusion of theological thematics in fiction. At “el museo del Discreto” (Parte II, crisi iv), theology is the queen of the sciences: “Coronava todas estas mansiones eternas uno, no ya camarín, sino sacrario, inmortal centro del espíritu, donde presidía el arte de las artes, la que enseña la divina policía, y estaba repartiendo estrellas en libros santos, tratados devotos, obras ascéticas y espirituales.” (“One, not then a lady chapel, but rather a tabernacle, immortal center of the spirit, where the art of arts presided, the one which teaches the divine policy, and was distributing stars in saintly books, devout treatises, ascetic and spiritual works, crowned all these eternal mansions”). In practice, however, the discipline fails to live up to its royal reputation. On the edge of “la cueva de la Nada” (Parte III, crisi viii), Critilo and Andrenio encounter a judgmental monster who hurls books of which he does not approve into the depths of nothingness. Using “solos dos dedos, como haziendo asco” (“only two fingers, as if turning up his nose”), he hurls away objects from buildings to books. As Critilo observes the monster’s literary tastes, he occasionally questions the monster’s assessments. When this monstrous companion attacks theology, Critilo is shocked, but he makes no attempt to defend the discipline against the repetitive nature of theological discourse:

> Alteróse mucho Critilo al verle alargar la mano azia algunos teólogos, assí escolásticos como morales y expositivos, y respondióle a su reparo:
> – Mira, los más de éstos ya no hazen otro que trasladar y volver a repetir lo que ya estava dicho. Tienen bravos cacoetes de estampar y es muy poco lo que añaden de nuevo; poco o nada inventan.
> De solos comentarios sobre la primera parte de Santo Tomás le vió echar media dozena y dezía:
> – ¡Andad allá!
> – ¿Qué dezís?
> – Lo dicho: y [no] haréis lo hecho. Allá van esos expositivos, secos como esparto, que texen lo que ha mil años que se estampó.”

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5 *El Criticón*, Parte II, crisi iv, p. 165.
6 *El Criticón*, Parte III, crisi viii, p. 268.
7 *El Criticón*, Parte III, crisi viii, pp. 272–73. Luis Sánchez Lailla, following Carlos Vaillós’s edition, suggests an alternate punctuation structure for a portion of the passage that removes Romera-Navarro’s insertion of the word “no”: “¡Andad allá, que decis