

Abstract

The reach of casuistry in early modern Spain is immense, from the strict sense of resolving penitents' "cases of conscience" to broader political, economic, legal and scientific issues. Yet, perhaps owing to its image as a sophisticated justification of suspect behavior and political expediency—a perception promoted by the Jansenist Pascal's famous denunciation of Jesuit "laxism" in his *Lettres provinciales* (1657)—, Spanish casuistry has been understudied. Building on the recent attention to casuistry and theatre, our project explores the interrelation between casuistry and narrative literature in Spain.

The trajectory of casuistry (from medieval *tutorism* to early modern *probabilism*) registers the destabilizing yet also liberating experience of an ever more contingent world permeating every aspect of life, including law, economy, theology and medicine. Casuistry itself, with its testing of precepts amidst the vagaries of circumstance, becomes a mode of imaginative argumentation and inquiry. Casuistry in medicine and natural philosophy helps us better understand affect, a significant aspect of the literary works under question. And the "Querelle des Femmes" tradition in late medieval sentimental novels, the casuistic debates of which would blossom in following centuries, allows us to bring out important considerations of gender in the literary works as well as in the culture more generally. As with Spanish theater, the *novella* develops around dilemmas relating to love and honor; and the flourishing of both literary forms coincides with crucial developments in moral philosophy.

Of particular interest to our project is the legacy of Scholasticism in Spain, and how the (mostly) Jesuit casuists combined scholastic method with humanist rhetoric and civic concerns in accordance with their educational and political orientation. Alongside the scholastic roots, we consider the relationship of casuistry to medieval jurisprudential thought, as well as to the narrative tradition of exemplarity. The effect of the transition from oral to print culture on argumentative structuring and dissemination is also given attention. We follow these ingredients as they enter the crucible of Early Modern discovery, crisis and innovation. In addition to analyzing the casuistic structure of Early Modern literary works, we trace actual source material to the rich compendium of "cases" in the confessors' *manuales*, and bring out the overlooked language of casuistry operative in many narratives. The result of this inquiry will be not only a renewed appreciation of the centrality of casuistry in early modern Spanish culture and literary production; it will yield an original perspective on the rise of the novel itself.