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The Dynamics of Triangulation in Cervantes's *El amante liberal*

Este ensayo analiza El amante liberal *de Miguel de Cervantes como una especie de psicomaquia en la que se dramatiza la pugna entre dos sistemas de triangulación interpersonal que cambian y moldean el carácter y la conducta del protagonista Ricardo, y hasta cierto punto, de la protagonista Leonisa. Se registran en el cuento el deseo mimético de René Girard, el cual degrada y deshumaniza a las personas, y la amistad cristiana desarrollada por Santo Tomás de Aquino, la cual fomenta el amor y la liberalidad, para explorar el tema de la identidad y ofrecer un paradigma cervantino de lectura e interpretación.*

Palabras clave: *Amante liberal, deseo triangular, amistad*

This essay analyzes Miguel de Cervantes's El amante liberal *as a type of psychomachia that dramatizes the battle between two systems of interpersonal triangulation that change and mold the conduct and character of the protagonist Ricardo, and to a degree, of the other protagonist Leonisa. René Girard's mimetic desire, which degrades and dehumanizes individuals, and St. Thomas Aquinas's Christian friendship, which foments love and generosity, are inscribed in the story to explore the theme of identity and offer a Cervantine paradigm of reading and interpretation. This paradigm allows for ambiguity, hybridity, and changing interpretations.*

Keywords: *Amante liberal, triangular desire, friendship*

Pioneering research on Miguel de Cervantes's *Novelas ejemplares* (1613) in the 1970s and 1980s by scholars such as Ruth El Saffar and Alban Forcione, among others, ushered in a new appreciation of the complexity and sophistication of the author's multifaceted experimentation with the romance genre. Since that time, *El amante liberal*, once among the *Novelas*' romance narratives most neglected by critics, has become the focal point of a variety of critical approaches that emphasize the interpretative challenge posed by the text as well as its highly innovative engagement with the romance tradition. As critics such as William Clamurro and Barbara Fuchs have demonstrated, although *El amante liberal* may appear at first glance to

enact the conventions of the romance genre in a traditional manner, the *novela* does so while simultaneously blending, complicating, undermining, and submitting them to varying degrees of irony.[1] This simultaneous pursuit of frequently oppositional aesthetic pathways generates an ambiguous, contradictory fictional world in which the concept of hybridity dominates all – hybridity of genres, cultures, religions, languages, empires, and identities. In addition, Cervantes complicates readers' interpretations of the text in painting the Mediterranean world of his epoch as simultaneously a space of cultural and commercial exchange, but also of danger, conflict, and violent confrontation. The author depicts this maritime world in which Spanish and Ottoman empires collide in such a convincing and verisimilar manner, bolstered by copious details that include accurate toponyms and geographical data, navigational minutiae, as well as historical references, that he seems to invite readers to approach the story as a commentary exclusively about this particular moment in time and space.

My study examines *El amante liberal* through a different critical lens, focusing on the interpersonal dynamics that proved to be of such keen interest to Cervantes throughout his literary career, and their relationship to the story's theme of identity as something which defies fixity and facile characterization. Identity, along with love and freedom, has long been recognized as one of the major themes of romance.[2] While this theme acquires special prominence in *El amante liberal*, as Clamurro has rightly emphasized, shifting external circumstances often tied to superficial details like clothing, or linked to forces beyond the protagonists' control, like being kidnapped by pirates, enslaved, and exchanged from one master to the next, often appear as markers of identity in the text. Yet such markers often mislead or distract from "the inner confusions of identity that lie at the heart" of the story (Clamurro 50).

In my opinion, *El amante liberal* constitutes a sort of psychomachia, not in the sense of a deliberate imitation of Prudentius's poem or the allegory enacted therein, but rather as a fictionalized projection of the interior conflict of the protagonist Ricardo, and to a lesser extent of the other protagonist Leonisa, that is, the internalized struggle implicated in those shifting external identity markers. Cervantes utilizes romance and the Mediterranean borderland of hybridity as a laboratory in which to explore the relationship between external pressures – tests or trials – and intersubjective experiences in the process of identity formation. He dramatizes that internal process through a dynamic of interpersonal triangulation that pervades *El amante liberal*. This dynamic proves key to the identity formation of the protagonists Ricardo and Leonisa, a process which is ambiguously resolved at the end of the narrative by Ricardo's

public demonstration of a more mature understanding of liberality and generosity, Leonisa's public choice to accept his offer of marriage, and the subsequent wedding of the two young people. The protagonists' identity journeys also provide insight into how readers might interpret the characters Mahamut and Halima, two key mediators in this dynamic of triangulation. In addition, the tale's development of these models of triangulation provides a paradigm for reading a *novela* that supports such a wide range of critical interpretations, and so powerfully resists clear or facile interpretative strategies.

Triangulation, a concept I have borrowed from the discipline of trigonometry and the art of surveying, refers to a method of finding a position or location by taking bearings from two fixed points at a known distance apart. In navigation, if one is lost, triangulation can serve to approximate one's own location, and arrange for help and rescue, or find one's own way back and/or forward to the desired path or destination. This term seems particularly appropriate for *El amante liberal*'s predominantly aquatic and nautical fictional world, and for the tale's protagonists, who so often appear literally or figuratively at sea, and lost or alienated from who they are or think they are. In fact, as the romance opens with a typically *in medias res* beginning, both Ricardo and Leonisa are lost. Ricardo has lost his family, his freedom, his Christian community and homeland of Trápana, his own sense of who he is along with his former identity, and the lady he loves, as he believes (falsely, as it turns out) she died after their kidnapping. Readers later discover that Leonisa has similarly lost family, freedom, community, homeland, and identity. Although not in love with Ricardo or seemingly with anyone else, she has lost whatever agency she formerly possessed in Sicily. When she does reappear close to Ricardo in Nicosia, Leonisa has been superficially transformed, reified, and commodified, to an even greater degree than her aspiring lover, as the pure, innocent, and beautiful object of desire of several rich, powerful men.

As *El amante liberal* unfolds, Cervantes puts two opposing systems of triangulated interpersonal relations in play in the text, one that produces loss of self and others while increasing immoral and dehumanizing behavior, and the other that produces self-restitution and renovation, recovery of self and others, while stimulating moral awareness, growth, and thoughtful behavior. The former corresponds to what René Girard has described as mimetic or triangular desire, in which generosity or *liberalidad* has no part. Girard defines mimetic desire as a model of relations in fiction in which a character's desire for an object does not arise spontaneously, but rather is determined by a mediator. Internal mediation, the form of triangular desire presented in *El amante liberal*, generates destructive

emotions such as envy, rivalry, jealousy, and resentment, as the desiring subject is locked in competition with the mediator for the same object of desire. This type of mediation can generate such intense rivalry that defeating or destroying the rival mediator can become more important than achieving the object of desire. The latter, opposing system of triangulation follows the relational model of loving friendship articulated by St. Thomas Aquinas and, closer to Cervantes's epoch, by Erasmus and other Christian intellectuals.[3] Together, in conflicted and crisscrossing patterns in the narrative, these systems of triangulated interpersonal dynamics push the protagonists out of their home, away from their initial identities, and into treacherous waters of loss. Eventually these relationships guide them back to Sicily's Trápana, where they will recover all that they have lost and, the story implies, acquire new identities improved morally by adversities faced and, thanks to friendship, survived.

At the beginning of *El amante liberal*, and without the intervention of a narrator, Cervantes plunges readers directly into the innermost thoughts and feelings of the protagonist Ricardo, expressed in a lengthy jeremiad delivered as the captive contemplates the ruins of Nicosia, recently conquered by the Turks. Through his identification with the landscape of destruction and desolation before him, Ricardo voices a tragic sense of loss and near desperation over the assumed death of his beloved Leonisa, as well as over his own lost freedom. As Ruth Fine has shown, however, his words imitate the discourse of the Old Testament Book of Lamentations, but in an ironic way in which the protagonist reveals the egotism and blindness of self-aggrandizement in terms of bearing witness to present and past history of tragic loss on a monumental scale (383-84). His friend Mahamut, a Christian renegade, and, like Ricardo and Leonisa, originally from Trápana, interrupts the lachrymose harangue and urges him to share the backstory of how he ended up enslaved and in Nicosia. Ricardo complies, with a narrative that, as is so often the case in Cervantes's fictional worlds, allows readers to see into the psyche of the character, bringing to light what can only be glimpsed or surmised from his initial words of woe, and demonstrating the author's intuitive grasp of how "story molds minds, alters our behavior and our personalities" (Gottschall 144). While Ricardo does not understand fully the revealing implications of the tale he will tell, Mahamut and the readers of *El amante liberal* most definitely do. This story helps the audience take full measure of Ricardo's state of mind and character, as well as measure the distance the protagonist must traverse to realize the inner transformation apparently achieved by the end of the *novela*.

The dynamics of Girardian mimetic desire first emerges in the context of this self-revelatory narrative, with Ricardo's narcissism blinding him to his own responsibility for precipitating both his own and Leonisa's current tragic state, a fate he labels "el confuso laberinto de mis males" (Cervantes, *Amante* 150). He tells Mahamut of his great love for Leonisa, but in fact, his notion of love equates to a selfish, possessive, and jealous passion that reifies and dehumanizes the lady, whom he characterizes only in terms of great physical beauty, describing her appearance in superficial, clichéd Petrarchan terms of idolatry.[4] In words filled with rage and resentment, Ricardo comments that his jealous passion was enflamed by the fact that Leonisa had another suitor, Cornelio, who, in his view, was favored by her because of his refined, effeminate looks and courtly manners, and by her parents, because of his potential as a rich husband. Even now, as Ricardo recounts the story, his anger over what he perceives as rejection by Leonisa and her parents, and his jealousy over the supposed favoritism extended to Cornelio, displace his proclaimed abiding love for her in the story: "Disimulaban los padres de Leonisa los favores que a Cornelio hacía, creyendo, como estaba en razón que creyesen, que atraído el mozo de su incomparable y bellísima hermosura, la escogería por su esposa, y en ello granjearían yerno más rico que conmigo" (153). Ricardo assumes an accusatory tone towards Leonisa, whom he claims would not look at him, "no quiso ponerlos [los ojos] en mi rostro, no tan delicado como el de Cornelio" (153), and he stops just short of imagining himself the victim of a conspiracy hatched by Leonisa and her parents to contract the preferred marital match with Cornelio. Not until the end of *El amante liberal* do readers discover that Cornelio's desire for Leonisa was never as great as that of Ricardo to the point that Cornelio was actually more of an imagined rival for Ricardo than a real one. At this point, however, Ricardo does not know that and remains convinced that he was horribly mistreated by the lady, her family, and that wealthy dandy of a competitor for her hand.

In the dynamics of Girard's triangular desire, when two people (Ricardo, Cornelio) share the same object of desire (Leonisa), they can "become gods in the eyes of each other," with the rivalry enslaving the competitors in a vicious fight that surpasses in importance the actual attainment of the desired object (Girard 53-82). Ricardo may be enslaved quite literally, and far from home in Nicosia, but he still seems enraged enough just recalling the events of the past to do battle with his rival if he were to appear before him. Although Leonisa, the desired lady, is now presumed dead, Ricardo still devotes more verbiage to his competition with Cornelio and assertions of his own superiority over his rival than to praising his beloved's fine qualities, thus affirming the very vanity and arrogance he

openly disavows. He argues that Leonisa's parents might have gained in Cornelio a rich son-in-law, but "no le alcanzaran, *sin arrogancia sea dicho,* de mejor condición que la mía, ni de más altos pensamientos, ni de más conocido valor que el mío" (Cervantes, *Amante* 153; emphasis added). At this moment, the protagonist resembles Girard's *vaniteux*, who, because of vanity, desires more intensely the object that is desired by an admired rival (Girard 7). While Ricardo voices disdain for Cornelio, he clearly wishes he could have been a little more like him. He does confess that his jealous anger over his rival reached such heights that "'me sacó de mis sentidos,'" and in that state of ire he confronts Leonisa, Cornelio, their parents, relatives, and retainers in the idyllic, harmonious space of a garden near the marina (Cervantes, *Amante* 154). He then proceeds to insult both Leonisa and Cornelio in aggressive and condescending fashion, without respecting the lady's free will to choose her future husband, and without recognizing the free will she possesses simply as a human being. Ricardo then tries to attack his quiet and passive rival as well as Cornelio's supporters. Yet just as the protagonist's rage explodes into physical violence his actions generate an almost psychokinetic, counteraction of amplified violence from external forces, as if that inner rage escaped and rebounded upon him and the woman he claims to love: "[D]e improviso dieron en el jardín mucha cantidad de turcos de dos galeotas de corsarios de Biserta" (156). A series of adventures and numerous peripeteia follow this attack in which Ricardo tells of his kidnapping and that of Leonisa by the Turkish corsairs, the fruitless attempts to ransom their freedom, the eventual separation of the kidnapped pair in different vessels, and the apparent death of Leonisa in a shipwreck. Throughout this story, Ricardo proves himself morally immature and incapable of spiritual reflection, lost and disoriented physically and spiritually, and as much a captive of the past as he is enslaved by the Turks without hope for the future. Ricardo can tell Mahamut his story, but he cannot take the measure of what he says and how he tells the tale.

That inner moral chaos and the blinding swirl of negative emotions, encapsulated in the image of the labyrinth, are subsequently projected outward in *El amante liberal*, and materialize on a much greater scale and in more spectacular form in the no-holds-barred competition between Alí Bajá, Hazán Bajá, and the elderly *cadí* (a judge) for possession of Leonisa. Ricardo's beloved has unexpectedly arrived in Nicosia just as Hazán replaces Alí as governor. Although Ricardo rejoices that she is alive, Leonisa's situation has grown more dire as she is now human merchandise owned by a Jewish merchant, and for sale at the right price. Even more objectified in their eyes than those of Ricardo in the past, Leonisa is a bejeweled, silent beauty grandly bedecked in costly Berber garb who

simultaneously arouses desire in the hearts of all three Turkish authorities: "[E]n aquel mismo punto nació en los corazones de los tres una, a su parecer, firme esperanza de alcanzarla y de gozarla" (Cervantes, *Amante* 169). The powerless Ricardo can do little more at this point than watch the mimetic desire of his Turkish masters intensify into a battle for supreme control over the slave Leonisa, as he bears witness to vain, aggressive behavior that recalls his own, bullying past actions.

Initially, the Turkish leaders compete with one another to purchase Leonisa, each man mimicking the false claim of the others to buy the beautiful slave as a gift for the Sultan (Suleiman the Magnificent). They argue over who has the rightful claim to make this gift to the Sultan, with the judge using his higher rank to win the opening battle over Leonisa's ownership. Of course, none of the men actually intends to give Leonisa to the Sultan. The competition intensifies in violence as the narrative progresses, until the *cadí* hatches a murderous plot: to lie to the Sultan, telling him that his intended gift, Leonisa, grew sick and died during the journey to Constantinople, while he actually kills his wife Halima in her place, and keeps the Christian slave for himself. This perverse plan meets with equally perverse counterplans hatched by the judge's rivals Alí and Hazán, each of whom pursues him in an armed ship with the objective of taking Leonisa by force. In the ensuing naval battle, winning at all costs, that is, annihilation of the rival and his men, displaces the goal of seizing the desired slave or any other objective. During this degrading mêlée, Alí stabs the *cadí* in the head, a gesture that echoes Ricardo's raising his sword against Cornelio and his companions in Trápana. However, Cervantes has magnified the violence manyfold in this bloody scene, emphasizing that most of the Turks kill each other, and that Ricardo and Mahamut, passive observers of the slaughter, accompanied by Leonisa and Halima, take advantage of this display of competitive madness to regain their freedom and commandeer one of the ships to take them home. Ricardo sees dramatized before him the tragic consequences of enslavement to vain rivalry, and the debasement and destruction that result from giving in to mimetic desire. He witnesses the extremes of the *cadí*'s fetishization of Leonisa, as even in defeat the Turk appears to ascribe magical healing powers to this object of his desire:

> [P]idió antes que se hiciese a la vela que Leonisa le abrazase, que aquella merced y favor sería bastante para poner en olvido toda su desventura. … Hizo Leonisa lo que le rogaron, y el cadí le pidió le pusiese las manos sobre la cabeza, por que [*sic*] él llevase esperanzas de sanar de su herida; en todo le contentó Leonisa. … [E]n breves horas perdieron de vista al bajel del cadí, el cual, con lágrimas en los ojos, estaba

mirando cómo se llevaban los vientos su hacienda, su gusto, su mujer y su alma. (Cervantes, *Amante* 195-96)

These sea breezes literally sweep the controlling deceiver from view while the figurative winds of his own vanity strip away all he holds dear. Ricardo's non-involvement in the battle suggests psychological as well as physical distance from their irrational actions, and movement away from that arrogant former self incapable of moral reflection and self-examination. In this way, Cervantes provides Ricardo, his companions, and the readers with sufficient critical distance to analyze and judge the immoral behavior of this troika of would-be lovers.

At the beginning of *El amante liberal*, however, Ricardo remains mired in the past and immersed in the negative dynamics of narcissism and mimetic desire. Cervantes quickly introduces another human point of reference in order to facilitate triangulation, which allows Ricardo to situate and identify himself in the current chaos and inspires his movement along a different path towards freedom from moral and physical enslavement. Mahamut, and the friendship he offers Ricardo, provide a model of virtuous conduct and an example of the dynamics of Christian friendship that counter the mimetic desire from which the protagonist increasingly distances himself as the story advances. As I will show, Cervantes grounds this paradigm of *amicitia* in Aquinas's Christianized version of friendship based on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, especially chapters eight and nine, in which, among other ideas about amity, the Greek philosopher asserts that a true friend is virtuous, and essentially "another self" (177). Aquinas expands the concept of friendship exponentially, making amity the basis for personal and social relationships, including marriage, as well as spiritual happiness, a state of grace that can be characterized as intimate friendship with God.[5] Although dressed in Turkish attire and ostensibly a renegade, Mahamut presents himself to Ricardo as a Christian in disguise, a friend and another self, who hails from the same locale, knows many of the same people, and shares the captive Christian's desire to regain his freedom and return home. Mahamut's brief account implies he may have been kidnapped, then converted at a young age, his tender years mitigating what would likely have been perceived as renegade status during Cervantes's epoch. He helps Ricardo overcome this initial state of melancholic inertia and plays a catalyzing role in the protagonist's transformation, which is realized through the friendship that he shares with him.

Aquinas classifies acts of friendship into three different groups: (1) acts of benevolence, which means that one wills good things for a friend or performs actions that help the friend obtain good things; (2) acts of concord,

which means that one's choice of action resembles that of the friend, thus enabling a shared life based on virtuous choices; and (3) acts of beneficence, which means that one does good deeds for the friend, deeds that benefit him.[7] Review of Mahamut's words and deeds when he approaches the forlorn Ricardo reveals that the renegade demonstrates all three categories of Christian amity. First, Mahamut greets Ricardo in an act of benevolence, stating simply that for friendship's sake he wishes to help him and alleviate his suffering: "[[D]ejemos estas cosas, que no llevan remedio, y vengamos a las tuyas, que quiero ver si le tienen; así te ruego, por lo que debes a la buena voluntad que te he mostrado … qué es la causa que te trae tan demasiadamente triste" (Cervantes, *Amante* 148-49). The backstory narrated by Ricardo then precipitates an act of concord in which the friends cry together in response to the tale, but they subsequently synchronize their wills to find a way to free themselves and return to Christian territory and, in the case of Mahamut, back to the Christian faith. The opening scene then ends with an act of charity or beneficence whereby Mahamut promises to arrange for Ricardo's transfer into the ownership of the *cadí*, the renegade's master, which will alleviate the captive's suffering to a degree and facilitate the friends' working together to concoct an escape plan. Mahamut fulfils his promise, which provides Ricardo with hope. The renegade's demonstration of friendship also shifts his focus from the past to the present and future, sparks his will, and spurs him into action. Moreover, since Leonisa by chance – or Providence – appears in Nicosia and becomes the slave of the *cadí*, Mahamut's beneficence helps generate the circumstances that will bring her and Ricardo back together and enable all three of them to work as a team to achieve their freedom.

In *El amante liberal* mimetic desire originates with Ricardo and his past interactions in Sicily, and then acquires contagious, escalating force among the Turks who vie for possession of Leonisa and for the Sultan's favor in Nicosia and *en route* to Constantinople. But Cervantes provides a more powerful vector, and counterforce, in the amity modeled by Mahamut, which gains momentum as the story progresses. This powerful shift in human interactions becomes apparent in the scene in which Ricardo meets Leonisa for the first time since their kidnapping, separation, and her presumed death. The circumstances are perilous, as the *cadí* has confided to Mahamut his desire to replace Halima with Leonisa and has enlisted his aid as well as that of Ricardo (renamed Mario) to act as go-betweens and advocates in winning the captive beauty, and as co-conspirators in his treacherous plans. Meanwhile Halima has confided in Leonisa that she burns for Ricardo/Mario and wishes her to act as go-between in the realization of her adulterous wishes. This encounter between the captive

Christians displays even more theatrical qualities than the previous exchange between Ricardo and Mahamut against the backdrop of battle-scarred Nicosia and acquires greater emotional intensity due to the intimate nature of the interior, domestic space in which the meeting occurs, and the fact that the young captives find themselves in the same adversity, caught in the crossfire between the competing, immoral desires of Halima and the *cadí*.

In this setting, the pair lay the foundation for a tentative friendship. Cervantes emphasizes this movement in their relationship through visual interplay, creating an almost cinematic montage in which the young people exchange meaningful gazes. Leonisa is seated at the foot of a staircase with "los ojos a la parte contraria de la puerta por donde entró Mario, de manera que, aunque él iba hacia la parte donde ella estaba, ella no le veía" (Cervantes, *Amante* 181). Ricardo looks for her, suddenly sees her, and filled with confused and conflicted emotions he approaches her, "cuando a deshora volvió el rostro Leonisa, y puso los ojos en los de Mario, que atentamente la miraba" (181). He advances and she retreats, employing gestures that seem to repeat in condensed form the past dynamics of desire and rejection. This pattern of behavior changes in short order as they begin to speak with one another in direct and honest fashion. In the literature of *amicitia* from Aristotle to Aquinas and beyond, open and sincere communication is considered essential to initiating and maintaining the highest level of friendship. Leonisa tells Ricardo that "siempre te tuve por desabrido y arrogante, y que presumías de ti algo más de lo que debías. Confieso que me engañaba, y que podría ser que hacer ahora la experiencia me pusiese la verdad delante de los ojos el desengaño" (186-87). Leonisa's frank admission and willingness to reconsider her former negative assessment of Ricardo's character open the door to potential friendship. The couple then makes a pact of concord, an act of amity whereby they agree to deceive their masters and pretend to serve as go-betweens in facilitating the illicit passions of Halima and the *cadí*. They agree to play for time with the objective of finding a way to gain their freedom, although Leonisa voices skepticism about their success, unable to imagine "ni qué salida se tome al laberinto donde … nuestra corta ventura nos tiene puestos" (186). Leonisa's feelings of entrapment, and her reference to the labyrinth, echo Ricardo's words in *El amante liberal's* opening scene, which reflects the newfound synchrony of spirit between the two as they seek a remedy for their shared tribulations. Moreover, when Leonisa declares that she is not in love with him, Ricardo accepts her declaration, although he hopes she will change her mind, but he does not take advantage of the situation to press his suit. He chooses to modify his behavior, correct his course of action, and leave

behind his former identity as the jealous, arrogant lover.[8] This friendly pact, together with the help and friendship of Mahamut, and a series of fortuitous or providential incidents will permit them to regain their freedom.

Readers observe along with Leonisa the emergence of a changed Ricardo, as he adapts to circumstances and metamorphoses into a person capable of planning, acting, and doing what he must to achieve the goals he shares with her and Mahamut. The other point of reference in these triangulated friendships, however, is the renegade Halima, a much more ambiguous and mysterious figure than Mahamut, and far less developed as a character than he is. The narrator informs readers that Halima is the daughter of Greek Christians, and readers may infer she converted to Islam to marry the wealthy and powerful *cadí*, a marriage in which both are now unhappy. While Cervantes portrays her desire for Ricardo as a moral infirmity, her weakness pales in comparison with the homicidal madness with which the *cadí* pursues his desires.

Halima only decides to accompany the three friends to Trápana, with her parents in tow, and re-convert to Christianity, once she discovers her husband's plans to kill her and after Mahamut and Ricardo honor her free will and give her the choice of returning to Muslim Cyprus or resettling in Christian Trápana. The future prospect of marriage to Ricardo that she still entertains immediately after the nautical battle over Leonisa provides added incentive to choose the Christian community as her new home. As far as readers can tell, selfless good will does not form as large a part of her identity as it does of Mahamut's. Yet at the end of *El amante liberal*, Halima is reconciled with the Church, and in compensation for her loss of Ricardo to Leonisa, she marries Mahamut, who has also returned to the Christian fold. This rather surprising transformation from self-serving sinner and opportunist to seemingly contented member of the Sicilian community may appear to defy logical explanation, but it aligns with both the unexpected changes so typical of romance conventions and the frequent, chameleon-like shifts of religion and political allegiance that characterized the volatile world of the Mediterranean at this time.[9]

Cervantes balances and juxtaposes the bloody skirmish at sea with the grand climax that takes place in Trápana as Ricardo, Leonisa, and their friends sail into the harbor, where they encounter their families, Cornelio and his family, and many of the city's inhabitants, together with the civil and religious authorities of the locale. The death and desolation of the marine battle and its aftermath are countered by a festive display of community, a celebration of life, restitution, and reconciliation. In keeping with the story's stylistic hallmark of at times ambiguous contrast between surface appearance and underlying reality, the ship carrying the returning captives

sails into home port with colorful pennants flying and shouts of happiness, its slow approach and use of cannon to announce arrival indicating the friendly nature of the vessel. In this way, Ricardo and his party successfully attract the attention and presence of nearly the entire city, and the inhabitants momentarily find themselves in a quandary, as the Turkish dress worn by everyone on the ship sends mixed messages about what to expect from the new arrivals. They disembark in almost choreographed fashion: "[T]odos, uno a uno, como en procesión, salieron a tierra, al cual con lágrimas de alegría besaron una y muchas veces, señal clara que dio a entender ser cristianos que con aquel bajel se habían alzado" (Cervantes, *Amante* 198). The combination of the procession and gestures of joy and gratitude identifies them as Christians, despite their attire, and sets the tone for this operatic scene of anagnorisis. With this dramatic tableau, Cervantes effectively reverses the opening in Nicosia, in which Ricardo's harangue reveals his narcissism and mimetic desire. The author also reverses the initial episode of kidnapping, in which the arrival of the corsairs is presented as a quick, violent, unexpected incursion that wrests citizens from their homeland in contrast to the slow, peaceful, staged scene of restitution recounted here.[10]

Ricardo and Leonisa take center stage and become the focal point of the activity among the gathered people, and Ricardo at first uses the spotlight to indulge in a pompous display of vanity and self-praise regarding all the successful actions taken to free himself, Leonisa, and the others. This show of egotistical self-aggrandizement culminates with a colossal, moral misstep that features Ricardo backsliding even further into mimetic desire in ostentatiously gifting Leonisa to his erstwhile rival Cornelio: "Ves aquí, ¡oh Cornelio!, te entrego la prenda que tú debes de estimar sobre todas las cosas que son dignas de estimarse; y ves aquí tú, ¡hermosa Leonisa!, te doy al que tú siempre has tenido en la memoria" (Cervantes, *Amante* 200). Ricardo adds to this presumptuous effrontery by labeling his words and actions *liberalidad*, ostentatiously presenting them as acts of exemplary magnanimity. Leonisa's silence, combined with her ornate Turkish dress, emphasize her dazzling physical beauty above all, and underscore the resurgence of the triangular paradigm that reifies and dehumanizes the objectifiers and the objectified person alike, temporarily depriving the female protagonist of her agency and making her seem once again a voiceless, fetishized idol.

When Ricardo finishes this part of his speech, however, he finds himself momentarily struck dumb, but it is in this brief interval that he regains his footing and corrects the course on which he had embarked:

> Yo, señores, con el deseo que tengo de hacer bien, no he mirado lo que he dicho, porque no es posible que nadie pueda demostrarse liberal de lo ajeno: ¿qué jurisdic[c]ión tengo yo en Leonisa para darla a otro? O ¿cómo puedo ofrecer lo que está tan lejos de ser mío? Leonisa es suya, y tan suya, que a faltarle sus padres, que felices años vivan, ningún opósito tuviera a su voluntad … (Cervantes, *Amante* 200-01)

In Thomistic thought, arrogance or excessive pride is one of the chief impediments to a joining of wills. Pride sows discord and prevents humans from entering successfully into social relationships, including marriage (Schwartz 11, 69-93). That pregnant moment of silence when Ricardo's tongue sticks to the roof of his mouth suggests that a quiet, internal moment of revelation and moral self-emendation occurs within the grand, public spectacle of anagnorisis. Previously, Ricardo had the opportunity to observe and reflect on the paradigms of mimetic desire and Christian friendship that played out before him externally. Significantly, here he appears to integrate and internalize those lessons, correcting the navigational course of his life by synchronizing his will in friendship with God, another Thomistic concept, and exercises genuine *liberalidad* or Christian charity, crystalized in a sincere act of beneficence for the woman he loves (Schwartz 28-29). Cervantes implies that God's mediation provides the corrective that enables this final stage of Ricardo's social and spiritual growth and maturity as well as facilitates the marriage between Ricardo and Leonisa. In fact, the protagonist's transformative words instantly change Leonisa from a lifeless idol to a mature woman who actualizes her agency, within the constraints of the time and culture, in decisive words and actions: "[S]iempre fui mía, sin estar sujeta a otro que a mis padres, a quien ahora humildemente, como es razón, suplico que me den licencia y libertad para disponer [de] la que tu mucha valentía y liberalidad me ha dado" (Cervantes, *Amante* 201). After her parents express complete faith in her good judgment, Leonisa chooses to marry Ricardo, and with special permission from the bishop and archbishop, the couple wed in church immediately afterward. Leonisa's forthright, public declaration, coming after the silence to which she has been consigned for so much of the story, provides a tantalizing glimpse of the strong woman whose very name links her to the lioness. The narrator recounts that universal happiness accompanies this event, and that Mahamut and Halima also marry after reconciling with the Church, everyone living in peace, harmony, and prosperity thanks to the *liberalidad* of Ricardo.

The pivotal roles of Mahamut and Halima as the customary helper figures of romance, and as mediators in the interpersonal systems of

triangulation enacted in the text, are thus rewarded at the end of the story, and the narrator explains that Ricardo's *liberalidad* extends to facilitating his friends' marriage and support of their parents with a portion of the spoils taken from the defeated Turks. Their happy, prosperous marriage following on their return to the Christian faith accords with the expectations of the time, and gestures towards some degree of spiritual growth and development. Yet as secondary characters, Mahamut and Halima not only lack the more detailed characterization given to Ricardo, and, to an extent, Leonisa, but they also function as doubles or shadow figures, other selves in the sense of the "other selves" that the protagonists might have been destined to become. Ricardo was kidnapped as an adult, albeit an immature one, but as a man with potential to acknowledge and exercise his own free will, and with the potential to change, make choices, and act upon his decisions, whereas Mahamut, as a kidnapped minor, had fewer options and less awareness of his own beliefs and consciousness, and apparently chose the role of feigned renegade, servant, and confidant to his master if only, readers might wonder, for purposes of self-preservation. In his state of melancholic paralysis at the beginning of the story, Ricardo seems determined to follow a more self-destructive path. Meanwhile, in the past, Halima likely chose, or her parents chose for her, to convert to Islam in order to marry a wealthy Muslim, a man who would eventually plot her murder. Supposedly, Leonisa preferred, or her parents preferred, Cornelio as a fiancé because of his wealth and the social prominence of his family. Halima was forced by circumstances, of uncertain making, to convert to Islam, while Leonisa, as the *cadí*'s replacement for her, likely faced a forced religious conversion if her master succeeded with his plans. Yet Cervantes's narrator, who supplies a surfeit of nautical and sartorial details, and displays a fascination (typical of the age, as the *novela morisca* shows) with Turkish mores, remains conspicuously silent about the inner worlds and motivations of these doubles. They do retain the names Mahamut and Halima from the beginning to the end of the story, when they become contentedly and comfortably part of the Christian community of Trápana.[11]

In his prologue, Cervantes informs the reader that he calls his collection the *Novelas ejemplares* because "si bien lo miras, no hay ninguna de quien no se pueda sacar algún ejemplo provechoso; y si no fuera por no alargar este sujeto, quizá te mostrara el sabroso y honesto fruto que se podría sacar, así de todas juntas, como de cada una de por sí" (56-57). The author invites readers to reflect on and interpret for themselves the exemplarity of each story, as well as that of the collection as a whole, an invitation that poses a challenge that is witty and playful, but also empowering, as that challenge respects the active and discerning minds of his audience. As in the case of

the companion story *La gitanilla*, *El amante liberal* celebrates the qualities and actions of friendship – virtuous character, honest communication, shared experiences including adventure and adversity, beneficence in words and deeds – as a strong foundation for enduring amity, a good marriage, and a harmonious community. Cervantes presents these lessons in *El amante liberal* through the juxtaposed systems of interpersonal triangulation that play out in contrast with each other in the story.

Throughout the tale, the author has depicted highly dramatic, theatrical scenes and encounters that capture the inner eye and imagination of his audience, practically demanding that, like Ricardo, individual readers be watchful, pay attention, consider and analyze what they see with the mind's eye. In this textual theater, Cervantes revives the Greco-Roman etymological sense of the *theatron/theatrum* as a space of viewing or beholding, in which readers are continuously prompted to see through and beyond surface appearances to perceive underlying truths and realities, including the ethical and unethical motivations that subtend personal and collective conduct. *El amante liberal* in this way offers the audience a fictional paradigm for exemplary living, a paradigm that also follows a dynamics of triangulation. Cervantes indicates that in life, as in this fictional world, readers must strive to see into the heart of matters, and while the physical eye may be temporarily distracted, misled into a mistaken assessment, or led astray all together by the unexpected, by fortune or misfortune, the reader/spectator must constantly consult that steadfast, inner moral compass that ideally synchronizes with God's values as a fixed point of reference. The harmony of that important relationship between humans and God allows for the virtuous recalibration of life's journey. While, like Ricardo, readers will inevitably go astray, misstep, backslide, and veer off-course from time to time in life, their cultivation of an ethical center that accords with God and virtuous conduct provides the key to charting a course that involves constant adjustment and adaptation, but that enables one to live an ethical and fulfilling life.

Moreover, Cervantes suggests that reading and interpreting his *novelas* assumes a pattern of triangulation in which he communicates sincerely with his audience through the fictional mediation of the exemplary narratives, and extends to readers "sabroso y honesto fruto," a gift that benefits the receptor/interpreter ("Prólogo" 57). Since the author exercises his own *liberalidad* in not dictating the specifics of the stories' exemplarity, he provides wide latitude for the reader's use of personal discernment in the interpretation of the *novelas*. This triangular dynamics of reading and interpretation encourages constant shifting and changing, accommodates contrasts, ambiguities and contradictions, as spectacularly demonstrated by

the variety of readings and critical interpretations of *El amante liberal*.[12] This same process fosters concord, an amiable pact between Cervantes and a diverse audience that overall foments friendship and community, a collective of friends, readers, and interpreters that even now continues to grow over four hundred years after the creation and publication of *El amante liberal* and the *Novelas ejemplares*.

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NOTES

1 On Cervantes's complex engagement with romance in the *Novelas ejemplares*, see Ruth El Saffar on *El amante liberal* (139-49); Alban Forcione on *La gitanilla* as Erasmian romance (93-223); Denise Cardaillac et al.; and Hart on *El amante liberal* and Cervantes's emulation of Heliodorus (41-55). The seminal articles of Gonzalo Díaz Migoyo and Nina Cox Davis respectively provide deconstructive and feminist readings of *El amante liberal*, emphasizing the contradictory, destabilizing elements in the story. William Clamurro demonstrates the complexity, subtlety, and ambiguity in Cervantes's development of the identity theme in the story (41-69), while Barbara Fuchs addresses fluid identity and hybridity in Cervantes's fiction in general (*Passing* 1-20), and passing, hybridity, and unstable identities in *El amante liberal* (*Passing* 63-86). For examples of research that focuses on cultural, sociopolitical, and sociohistorical aspects of the early modern Mediterranean world pertaining to *El amante liberal* see Lucía López Rubio; Elizabeth Howe; and Fuchs on *El Abencerraje* and the *novela morisca*, (*Exotic* 33-45), and on Maurophilia as fashion contributing to hybridization in Iberian culture, (*Exotic* 60-87).

2 On the major themes of romance, which can be traced to the Greek romances of classical antiquity see Fuchs (*Romance* 3-4, 27-31, 34, 58, 66) and Northrop Frye (4, 15, 24, 104-05, 113-15, 129, 132).

3 Clamurro notes the importance of triangles, including identity triangles as well as love triangles in the narrative (50-51). See René Girard for a more detailed explanation of the paradigm of mimetic, mediated desire (1-52). According to Peter Burke (262-74), an early engagement with Aquinas's Christianized approach to loving friendship occurs in Marsilio Ficino's commentaries on Plato's *Symposium*, sometimes referred to as *De amore* (1469). It is important to note that on the matter of Christian friendship neither Ficino nor Erasmus was in lockstep with Aquinas. In fact, there were a wide variety of approaches to the relationship between friendship (*amicitia*) and universal Christian love (*caritas*) among Christian humanists. The exploration of that relationship was

a topic of interest among Early Modern humanists. These intellectuals enthusiastically embraced the *practice* of amity in friendship circles modeled after Petrarch's circle of friends linked by letter-writing and the exchange of ideas and affection. Erasmus's circle of amity, for instance, included Sir Thomas More, Peter Gillis, and Juan Luis Vives, while that of Pietro Bembo, included Raphael and Baldassare Castiglione.

4 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick underscores the relationship between Girardian love triangles and the rivalry, primarily, between two males over a female, as a matter of power that maintains and perpetuates patriarchy (21-25).

5 On Aristotle's concepts of the friend as another self, and of friendship and civic virtues see his *Nicomachean Ethics* (143-82). Aristotle states that "a friend, since he is another self, provides what a person cannot provide by himself" (177). Lorraine Smith Pangle analyzes the major principles of Aristotle's philosophy of friendship (36-56, 142-54), while Dick Baltzly and Nick Eliopoulos discuss Aristotle's views within the context of classical ideals of amity. According to Reginald Hyatte, Aquinas likely completed his line-by-line commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* in the early 1270s and may have started work on it ten years earlier (206). Most of Aquinas's views on *amicitia* and *caritas* can be found in his *Summa Theologica*, Part 2 of Part 2, Questions 22-33 (3: 1259-1335). On Aquinas's concept of Christian friendship and his Christianization of Aristotle's philosophy of amity, see E. D. H. (Liz) Carmichael (105-28) and Daniel Schwartz (1-21). Aquinas equates *caritas* with friendship and considers marriage as a form of amity (Schwartz 96-98). Following in this same tradition, and closer to the time of Cervantes, Erasmus wrote about Christian amity. His views on Christian friendship emerge in a variety of works, including his *Adagia* (1508), *Enchiridion militis christiani* (1503), *Querela pacis* (1521), and the colloquy *Amicitia* (1531), among others. For more on Erasmus's views on Christian friendship and the humanist praxis of amity, see Kathy Eden, Carolyn James, and Bill Kent (122-23, 132-37). Regarding Erasmus's views on marriage, including marriage as a form of friendship see Émile Telle (160-76, 347, 420) and Constance Furey (29-43). On Cervantes's creative engagement with Erasmus's concept of marriage, see Forcione (93-223).

6 Julia D'Onofrio approaches the Ricardo-Mahamut interaction in a different, yet parallel way, reading Ricardo's soliloquy as a manifestation of a sickly melancholic who subsequently encounters a therapeutic cure in conversation with Mahamut (209-12).

7 My summary of the Thomistic acts of friendship is based on the analysis by Schwartz (6-9, 22-41). Pangle's description of Aristotle's acts of friendship clearly shows the close relationship between this classical model and Aquinas's Christianized version (155-68).

8 D'Onofrio sees this scene as being similar to the opening scene, with the difference that here the two melancholy captives alleviate each other's suffering through conversation (214-15).

9 Hutchinson's *Frontier Narratives* shows how easily identities, especially those linked to religious and political allegiances, could shift in the frontier zone of the Mediterranean in the period 1570-1670. Chapter 3, "Renegades," demonstrates how widespread religious conversion was, sometimes multiple times for an individual, which contributed to the phenomena of hybridity and fluid identity at the time. For a critical viewpoint that differs from my own about such elements as the shifting identities of characters see Peter Dunn (91-97). He states: "Cervantes has produced a playful and ironic critique of the generic conventions of Greek romance" (Dunn 96).

10 Antonio Rey Hazas analyzes the Cervantine cultivation of *auto-reescritura* as a hallmark of the author's process of composition (119-21). Rey Hazas also notes that the theatricality and elaborate staging of scenes such as Ricardo and Leonisa's return to Trápana likely represent Cervantes's adaptation of elements from his own plays and theater experience to prose (155-56).

11 Readers may speculate about what Cervantes might be trying to tell his audience in 1613, after Philip III's 1609 decree expelling the *moriscos*. The names gesture toward the deliberate retention of that hybrid identity of both characters, reminiscent of the author's adaptation of the surname of Saavedra, likely of Arabic origin, after his years of captivity in Algiers, and probably as a matter of pride (López-Baralt 414-21).

12 Stepthen Boyd analyzes the multiple facets of Cervantes's concept of exemplarity as developed in the prologue to the collection of *novellas* (51-57). Regarding Cervantes's famous comparison of reading his *novelas*, and fiction in general, to playing billiards in the public square, Boyd observes: "Then one may become conscious that, in the sense that they [the *novelas*] present complex intellectual challenges to their readers, they are 'interactive', like the game played at the table; the words of the text are fixed on the page (like the number of balls in the game) but often they are the vehicle for fluid, shifting patterns of meaning and plays of irony that seem designed to make the stories reveal themselves to different readers in different ways in different successive acts of reading" (54). Colin Thompson links exemplarity with Aquinas's notion of *eutrapelia*, the correct use of literature, both as harmless recreation and healthy therapy for body and soul (261-66). Thompson also explores how Cervantes provides a witty and sophisticated means of reconciling entertainment and exemplarity in the prologue of the *Novelas ejemplares.*

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