

Juan Pablo Gil-Osle. *Amistades imperfectas: Del Humanismo a la Ilustración con Cervantes*.

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In his recent study *Amistades imperfectas*, Juan Pablo Gil-Osle examines the evolution of what he describes alternatively as “imperfect” or “partial” friendship within a selection of works by Miguel de Cervantes. The notion of partial friendship is defined in relation both to the classical tradition of perfect *amicitia* — as articulated by Aristotle and later Cicero — and to what Louis Sorieri, and later Juan Bautista Avallé-Arce, viewed as the paradigmatic instance of perfect friendship in the early Renaissance, namely, the story of Gisippus and Titus from book 10 of Boccaccio’s *Decameron*. In both instances Cervantes is seen to embody a point of historical transition away from this idealized paradigm toward an understanding of friendship that reflects the contours of an evolving early modernity. As Gil-Osle explains in his introduction, “partial representations of friendship form part of the values of an emergent bourgeoisie that did not necessarily share the ideals of the nobility, with its patronage economy and its aristocratic symbolism of *amicitia*” (24–25).

This emphasis on historical context leads in a couple of directions. First, Gil-Osle’s study demonstrates a pervasive interest in biographically motivated readings of Cervantes’s work, especially as a reflection of his often-frustrated attempts to thrive within the patronage system that was an important source of economic support for writers at the time. Second, his study does not limit itself to more traditional literary modes of analysis, leveraging additional scholarship in the social sciences, especially anthropology, in attempting to explain the theme of friendship in Cervantes’s writings. This move suggests that Gil-Osle views the literary representation of friendship as closely tied to its sociological expression, a not unreasonable assertion that further grounds his project in the historical context of Spanish early modernity.

The book contains chapters on a broad cross-section of Cervantes’s oeuvre: among the works he considers are *La Galatea*, *La Numancia*, *Don Quixote*, *Los trabajos de Persiles y Segismunda*, and various stories from the *Novelas ejemplares*. More than a single narrative of Cervantine friendship, however, the chapters that make up Gil-Osle’s study operate more as individual essays that collectively provide a window upon a range of perspectives on this important aspect of Cervantes’s work. In chapter 1 he explores how the “Canto de Calíope” from *La Galatea* may be read as a reflection on Cervantes’s personal relationship to the patronage system. Chapter 2 undertakes a reassessment of *La Numancia* from a Virgilian perspective, comparing the relationship between Marandro and Leonico to Nisus and Euryalus in the *Aeneid*. Chapter 3 examines Cervantes’s notorious story of failed friendship, “El curioso impertinente” (“The Tale of Foolish Curiosity”) from the *Quixote*, and discovers, once again, a reflection of Cervantes’s on-going difficulties with the patronage system. Chapter 4 moves in a very different direction, exploring the link

between friendship in the *Novelas ejemplares* and occult theories of numerology, while Gil-Osle's final chapter focuses on Cervantes's late work, *Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda*, arguing for a progressive evolution within the novel's representation of friendship from what he describes as "la barbarie destructiva" ("destructive barbarism") to "*philia-amicitia* for the construction of a republic and its orderly maintenance," and finally, "to the *agape* of the pious Christian friends" (146).

A full engagement with all of the themes just listed would be impossible in such a short space. However, I would venture a couple of more general observations about Gil-Osle's study taken as a whole. First, he consistently demonstrates throughout his writing an impressive level of scholarly erudition. This is especially true of his engagement with the primary sources that are the focus of his study where he displays a deep knowledge of the Cervantine critical tradition going back several generations. Second, Gil-Osle's readings are, for the most part, highly original, frequently illuminating aspects of Cervantes's writings that have been largely overlooked in previous scholarship. While critics may quibble with some of the details of Gil-Osle's analysis, Golden Age Hispanists and scholars of early modern cultural studies more generally will find much to admire in this ambitious study.

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