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**Arnalte's Narcissism in Diego de San Pedro's
*Tractado de amores de Arnalte y Lucenda***

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Hipertexto

Narcissus, having shunned the nymph Echo's love, kneels at a pool of water and, upon seeing his reflection, becomes so absorbed with himself that he spends the rest of his days on the banks of the pond pining away for himself. Echo, doomed to a life of only reflecting back part of what others have said, spends the rest of her life yearning for Narcissus. The seer Tiresias had predicted that Narcissus would die when he saw his reflection in the water, which becomes Narcissus' entire world, there only to reflect aspects of him. In effect, Narcissus is dead to the rest of the world and to himself long before he dies physically and transforms into a flower. He cannot acknowledge Echo's love for him because he has no understanding of other. In his world she exists only to reflect his own voice and essence. Like the water, Echo is but a mirror. Narcissus has no internal substance and thus is concerned only with his appearance and reflection in the pool, rendering his existence a void. His reflection has no essence, he has no meaningful contact with others, and he is hollow, allowing echoes to reverberate throughout his narcissistic being.

To a certain degree narcissism is healthy in human beings because it entails real self esteem and the capacity to share in others' emotional lives. The unhealthy narcissist lacks a true sense of self and an internalized system of values, and encompasses a sense of entitlement, rages, arrogance, and an absence of empathy (Hotchkiss xvii). Narcissists cannot distinguish between their ideal and actual images and are so preoccupied with the self that they do not recognize others (Lowen 6-7). While sometimes mistaken as overly self loving, narcissists rather experience an extraordinary sense of self loathing, which they mask with deceptive words and actions. They have a need for others to see them as superior because image is all that exists for them, and they will

put on grandiose displays to stave off depression (Lowen 17-18). Essentially, the world exists only to reflect back at the narcissist aspects of himself. Therefore, from the narcissist's perspective others do not have independent thoughts or feelings and are mere extensions of the self, who provide the internal substance and support that the narcissist lacks. Everyone feels what he feels, knows what he knows, and lives only to ensure his comfort, welfare, and happiness. Anyone who displays thoughts or feelings independent of the narcissist's fantasy world will meet the narcissist's wrath and will be subjected to ever stronger attempts at control and annihilation of their personality. With his attempts at control the narcissist can maintain his fantastical self image of perfection and avoid acknowledging his own human traits, which must include flaws.

Diego de San Pedro elaborates on the story of Narcissus and Echo in his *Tractado de amores de Arnalte y Lucenda* with the intention of decrying the system of courtly love and exposing its flaws. The sentimental novel tests the conventions of courtly love and is about social crisis and society's clash with codes of conduct (Cortijo Ocaña 10). Love will never flourish in such a society; "El amor no puede realizarse, sea mutuo o no, sea honesto o no: la sociedad con sus firmes reglas de convivencia lo suprime" (Rohland de Langbehn 173). Not only does this system destroy Arnalte by robbing him of the ability to develop and establish a solid set of internal values and real feelings of love, but it also obliges him to destroy Lucenda and his friend Elierso because he cannot help but surrender to his narcissism. This article, after a brief synopsis, will demonstrate how San Pedro eschews the system of courtly love by highlighting Arnalte's narcissistic qualities, which in turn impede any true expression of love.

The novel opens as the narrator ventures forth for a walk and loses himself in a great desert. He comes upon a mountain bathed in smoke, evidence that people live there. After some difficulty climbing, he finds a house covered in black where some men dressed in mourning meander about displaying great sadness. He meets the owner of the house, the courtly knight Arnalte, whose attitude and actions toward his newly arrived guest appear courteous by feeding him and taking him to mass. When he is sure his guest is satisfied, Arnalte tells him the reason for the sadness and mourning with the request that his guest record everything so that Arnalte's story may be known by all.

The story of Arnalte and Lucenda begins when Arnalte meets Lucenda at her father's funeral where he is struck by her beauty and immediately falls in love. In order to gain her family's confidence, Arnalte sends his page to her house. Once the page has ingratiated himself to the family, Arnalte sends a letter to his new object of desire with the page in which he declares his feelings of undying love for her and requests a visit. Lucenda, as she must, rejects the letter by shredding it, which causes Arnalte to fall deeper into suffering. Arnalte then devises a way to speak with her without incurring society's judgment by dressing as a woman and approaching her at church. Despite his efforts, Lucenda again rejects him and he wallows in desperation and self pity lamenting his state of affairs to the narrator.

Meanwhile, his friends, and even the king notice that Arnalte suffers from lovesickness and urge him to participate in courtly games in order to cure him of his illness. He attends a courtly party where he is successful in convincing Lucenda to dance with him. Afterwards, while the tables are being set, Arnalte writes Lucenda another letter, again declaring undying love for her. She receives the letter, although he never sees her with it and never discovers whether she read it.

Later, Arnalte's sister Belisa notices that her brother is not well and discerns that Lucenda, who happens to be Belisa's friend, is the object of Arnalte's desire. Belisa speaks with Lucenda to try to convince her to surrender to her brother's desires, but Lucenda resists in order to defend her honor. She does, nonetheless, write a letter to Arnalte in which she expresses sorrow for his plight, but does not compromise herself. He responds to her letter with another, again begging her to relieve him of his pain. Arnalte visits her again but once again Lucenda argues with him in order to protect her honor. He furthermore breaks the rules of courtly love by divulging the secret of his romantic desire to his friend Elierso.

Afterwards Belisa and Arnalte go to the country to go hunting. While there, he hears the news that his friend Elierso has married Lucenda. Enraged, Arnalte challenges Elierso to a duel, which he wins leaving Lucenda a widow. She enters a convent, while he leaves the estate to his sister and exiles himself to the mountain among the wild beasts where the narrator finds him.

Arnalte's fantasy image of himself becomes apparent immediately when the narrator must cross a desert and climb a mountain full of obstacles to reach Arnalte's place of mourning; "halléme en un grand desierto, el cual de estraña soledad y temeroso espanto era poblado" (155). The desert, hot, dry, and barren, reflects the vacuity of Arnalte's spirit because his narcissism prevents him from understanding the concept of other. The mountain the narrator finds on the other side of the desert represents the fantasy image of the world Arnalte has created for himself. "Y como [por] la espesa montaña a entrar començase, hallé tan fragoso el camino y tan espantosa la [manera] dél, que me hallé tan arrepentido de la entrada como deseoso de la salida" (155). The difficulty of the approach mirrors the labyrinth of brambles narcissists erect to protect themselves from acknowledging a world outside of themselves because it may include criticism of their human frailties. Narcissists cannot tolerate the humiliation of criticism because it signifies another person's power over them (Lowen 76). The narrator is successful in penetrating Arnalte's outward defenses but only because he serves as a useful tool in furthering his narcissistic plans, and can act as another extension of Arnalte. The narrator will become like the men who share in Arnalte's exile, reflecting his grief; "ciertos hombres se paseavan, los rostros cubiertos de dolor, y los cuerpos de luto muy trabajado" (156); "todas las gentes de aquella casa con aquejados lloros e gemidos mortales" (157). These servants are not autonomous people but rather are extensions of Arnalte, obliged to serve as his reflecting pool.

At first glance Arnalte appears to be courteous and generous with his guest, just as a courtly knight should be; “y después que la cena tovo cabo, el cavallero [triste], que no menos discreto que bien proveído era, sin mucho en preguntarme, entremeterse, conosci[en]do mi cansancio, haviendo gana de mi descanso” (156). Yet, his courtesy is self serving. He must at least appear to take his guest’s needs seriously in order to have that guest perform the task of publicizing his story. He must also maintain the image of the perfect courtly knight to avoid criticism and its inherent humiliation. Arnalte’s courteousness also serves to ingratiate him to his intended audience, the ladies of Queen Isabel’s court, before they can have an opportunity to sympathize with the lady of the story, a member of their own sex and the victim of Arnalte’s narcissistic control. To bolster the Queen’s favor, he asks about her welfare and appears to be concerned for the ladies of the court. He also states that he wants the ladies of the court to know his story, although it is a grave violation of the rules of courtly love to reveal the secrets of one’s romance. Arnalte’s narcissism is what compels him to break this important rule because, in a narcissist’s mind, he is exempt from rules (Hotchkiss 7). Thus, he can break rules without the weight of conscience, and can gain center stage by garnering sympathy, which he feels entitled to. As Maureen Ihrie observes, the sentimental romance utilizes rhetoric, the art of persuasion, through both the written and spoken word (2). Arnalte’s actions, cloistering himself in the wilderness and appearing to have concern for his guest and audience, embellish his use of such rhetoric to persuade his audience that he is an exemplary courtly knight. Once he has established this image, he is free to continue pursuing control over his world by divulging the secrets of his romance in an act of vengeance against Lucenda (Wright 436).

Because Arnalte tells the story he alone controls the other characters, who provide excellent examples of the reflective pool in which Narcissus gazes. His autobiographical style also serves to convey a sentiment of pain that was unjustly produced (Rey 99), which enhances the victim-of-love quality Arnalte wishes to cultivate. The rules of courtly love promise the trophy of love and a happy ending in return for adherence to the rules¹. Yet, these rules fail Arnalte because love (emotion) does not follow a set of rules (reason), which have also displaced, or prevented from ever existing, Arnalte’s internal set of values and strength. San Pedro clearly illustrates through Arnalte that the ideal of courtly love is impossible (Cvitanovic 131) and that such lofty standards imposed from the outside swindle people of a solid set of internal values and of their individuality.

Real love entails the ability to empathize and maintain a reciprocal understanding of the other. While Pamela Waley asserts that San Pedro is the first to present the lady’s point of view in Castilian (255), it is important to remember that Arnalte’s words present the ladies in the story, thus he maintains complete control over them, rendering it questionable that the ladies’ point of view is presented accurately, revealing that a relationship of mutual

¹ “porque donde sobra conocer no mengua razón, e donde hay ést[a] no puede ser que donde se merece galardón de se dé” (170).

understanding, respect, and honor is nonexistent. Furthermore, because Lucenda appears to abide the rules of courtly love, it is impossible to discern her true feelings. “El suyo es un discurso extremadamente restringido, encerrado, prisionero, delimitado por las convenciones sociales que dictan las normas del código de conducta (verbal o física) del honor y por la misma naturaleza falocéntrica del lenguaje.” Lucenda’s state of mind remains ambiguous (García 88-89), which contributes to Arnalte’s illusion that she is a blank slate upon which he may impose his own image. Arnalte’s desire to control her becomes apparent immediately when he begins his story.

Arnalte states that he meets Lucenda at her father’s funeral and that he is frightened by the pain it causes her (168), yet in his first letter to her, Arnalte does not acknowledge her loss nor does he offer any words of sympathy, demonstrating a clear lack of empathy. He does not want what she wants, only what he wants (Whinnom 60). His letter is directed at her only as she relates to him. He declares that she has power over his heart and freedom; rhetoric that may appear romantic, but is really an attempt at control by holding Lucenda responsible for his feelings, desires, and needs despite the fact that she does not have any control over them². Under such circumstances, Arnalte would be free to express himself as his desires dictate without taking responsibility for them. Lucenda’s rejection of Arnalte causes him to verbally produce more. “The very act of speaking is akin to an act of power for Arnalte. [...] If he can convince through words he will find physical relief (Wright 433-44). Beyond that, he will achieve the control that narcissists seek as his dominance will ensure that Lucenda’s words and actions are but echoes of his own fantastical self image. By holding her responsible for his feelings, Arnalte attempts further manipulation with that sense of blame (García 96).

Arnalte does not appear to understand that, according to the rules of courtly love, the lady must reject the first advances of a suitor regardless of her feelings. Such a rule does not align with a narcissist’s desires or ideas about the world, which must always stand ready to fulfill his every wish. Non-fulfillment only drives him to seek further control. When he dresses as a woman to speak to Lucenda, the scene is not only comical, but evokes the idea of dementia, which love was thought to cause during the Middle Ages. Yet, it is not love but merely the need to control and subdue the sensation of vulnerability born of longing for someone. Thus, while society’s conventions have suppressed Lucenda’s self-expression, they have also induced narcissistic suppression in men by declaring shame an unacceptable masculine experience.

In this scene, Arnalte attempts to place even greater responsibility on Lucenda by telling her she has the power to save his life, while at the same time trivializing Lucenda’s desire, right, and duty to protect her own honor³.

² “que cuando quise no quererte, ni yo puede, ni tú me dexaste” (170).

³ “No sé qué ganancia de mi pérdida esperas” (172); “qué dañas la condición tuya, y destruyes la salud mía. ¿Qué excusa puedes poner, que de mal acondicionada te desculpe?” (172); “Si dizes

Discounting the other's person is a tactic often used by narcissists in order to manipulate the other into granting demands and desires. Of course, this tactic only works if the other wants the narcissist's approval and also assumes the other has no sense of self. In Arnalte's mind, Lucenda's only value is that she reflect him. That she, in fact, has reflected back Arnalte's hollowness with her silence serves only to fuel Arnalte's desire for praise and admiration so he may restore his fantastical self image of perfection. Arnalte's dressing as a woman may also serve as a model for the ladies of the court. San Pedro has clearly involved the ladies in the opening scenes of the story and later alludes to the idea that he desires them to influence the social conventions that surround romantic relationships. Belisa's words to Lucenda, "En tu propósito por causa mía establece nuevas leys" (196), appear to be directed more at the court ladies than at Lucenda, who is only one woman and powerless to change the entire system. Furthermore, Arnalte's dressing as a woman, but speaking as a man, provides a model for the court ladies to also speak as freely as men, demonstrating that a man's voice can indeed emanate from one dressed in women's clothing, but also emphasizes that Arnalte speaks for Lucenda as he recounts his story. The scene may also illustrate the loss of the sense of self society's conventions have cultivated.

In his second letter to Lucenda, Arnalte does appear to recognize that she must defend her honor, but the idea that she may not have feelings for him never occurs to him, as such an idea cannot fit into the narcissist's world. He has decided for her that she must love him, and he must have her admiration to bolster his own hollow self. In this second letter, Arnalte demonstrates another manipulative tactic; that of naming something that will satisfy him, only to minimize or "forget" it later and present a larger demand. If she only look at him, he will be happy, implying that he will leave her alone if she complies⁴. Arnalte not only attempts, yet again, to hold Lucenda responsible for his feelings, but is also unwilling to accept a refusal, transforming his request into a command. In a narcissist's mind, the object of control would never refuse a "request," which explains how Arnalte can so arrogantly "pardon" Lucenda for the pain she has already "caused" him (181). Arnalte commands verbal manipulative techniques well in order to gain control over Lucenda. Several times he tells Lucenda that if she will cede one show of affection, a look, a letter, a conversation, a kiss, he will be satisfied, with the implication that he will leave her alone. But he cannot. Each conquest only spurs desire for more as the narcissist cannot be sated until he has acquired full control of the object and depleted all of its/her energy. Lucenda's responses of allowing a conversation and writing a letter leave Arnalte

que para ti es grand graveza fablarme, te[m]iendo tu honra, no te engañes, que mayor invirtud será matarme que remediarme te sera fealdad" (173).

⁴ "Si esto que te suplico, porque temes con la paz de mi vida dar a tu honra guerra, de hazer dexas, no lo fagas, que no quiero, pues no quieres, que me hables; pero que solo me mires, y con solo este bien el mal que me has hecho te perdono" (181).

unsatisfied because they are not sincere gestures on Lucenda's part, but only the result of coercive tactics, which clearly demonstrates that society's conventions produce only hollow imitations, indicating a suppression of the full expression of human potential. On some level Arnalte senses that lack of sincerity, which produces his uncontrollable desire to seek more in order to fill the void the rules of courtly love have helped create. His search, however, is futile because society's conventions have destroyed the possibility of genuine communication dooming its victims to an endlessly repeated choreographed dance.

The desperation such a life produces is found in another manipulative tactic that Arnalte employs; that of threatening suicide, again illustrating his narcissistic belief that his life is more important than hers and that Lucenda is responsible for his decisions. He describes himself as a victim in order to procure his desires, without the awareness that anything gained under such a threat would never be genuine. According to Dinko Cvitanovic, the desire to die is a painful reaction to unrequited love (133). While there is no doubt that Arnalte feels great pain, or at least the shame of failing to win Lucenda's love, he uses the threat of death as a tool with which to manipulate, and as Dorothy Severin points out, "Arnalte does not even have the decency to die of love at the end of the work" (313), highlighting the manipulative hue and lack of sincerity of his words.

San Pedro also illustrates society's narcissistic view of women in the conversation between Arnalte and Elierso when Arnalte betrays the rules of courtly love and divulges the secret and Lucenda's name. Arnalte is unable to meet this requirement of the rules of courtly love because the sense of failure he feels at not gaining control over Lucenda's heart is too great to bear. He jeopardizes the object of his desire in order to relieve himself of his self-imposed pain, which serves as a reminder of his imperfection. That he is imperfect by breaking this rule is not important because he considers himself an exception to the rules. Furthermore, Lucenda has wounded him with her rejection. In order to restore his sense of superiority and control, Arnalte must wound her back by betraying her name.

The matter of honor for medieval Spanish women at this time was not just a personal affair because a stain on her honor would also extend to her male protector, be it her father, brother, or husband. Arnalte's expectation that Lucenda jeopardize her honor in order that his narcissistic thirst be quenched is not trivial and further demonstrates Arnalte's inability to empathize with others or understand society's conventions. His narcissistic traits extend to his sister Belisa, who also attempts to coerce Lucenda through manipulative words to surrender to the demands of her brother. Like her brother, Belisa places the responsibility for Arnalte's life on Lucenda's shoulders. Belisa's motive is not only to protect her brother's life as well as her own since she would be left without a male protector if he were to die. She does not respect Lucenda's desire to maintain her honor intact and also speaks as if she considers her an object to be controlled. "Pues si tú tal consientes, de su destierro y mi muerte ser[ás] causa" (195). "¡Cuánto desagradecimiento tienes! ¡A tanto bien cuánto

mal fazes” (195)! Out of the mouth of Arnalte as he tells the story, Belisa acts as an extension of her brother. She is there only to serve the needs of Arnalte and speaks as if she were merely an extension of him. His pain is her pain, his suffering is her suffering. Such an interpretation signals the fulfillment of the narcissist’s fantasy. “Cata que con gran voluntad estoy a la muerte ofrecida, si por ella alegre vida darte puedo” (184). Belisa offers more to her brother than he offers to Lucenda yet, because Belisa is also controlled by Arnalte’s words, her words and actions toward Lucenda are also questionable. Her greater purpose is to reflect the quality of generosity back at Arnalte so that he may vicariously fantasize that it is he who is generous.

Later, when Lucenda appears to concede victory to Arnalte in her letter, he remains unsatisfied and complains, “cuando falta[n] las obras las palabras deben por dubdosas tenerse” (194). Lucenda has served well as Arnalte’s reflection because he has done nothing to prove his love for her. He has used only manipulative verbal tactics to coerce her. The despair he feels after reading her letter is rooted in his attempt to dismiss the flaws she reflects back at him. Thus, Arnalte cannot even gaze into the pool to discern his true reflection and must rather distort it with ripples to be able to tolerate it.

Arnalte’s narcissistic control also extends to his friend Elierso, who displays a more generalized narcissistic attitude toward women. He does not understand how Arnalte could be defeated by a woman (189). Elierso trivializes love because he considers it a means for women to control men and believes reason can conquer it.

Tú que de las cosas más peligrosas eres vencedor, ¿cómo puedes de una muger ser vencido? Acuérdate cuánto es vergonzosa la memoria que de tal infamia se infamia. Con tu seso suelta tu fee; con la razón desata tu daño; con tu saber a ti te liberta. Ten desamor a los engaños de amar; por tal ley no te rigas. (189)

Elierso urges Arnalte not to surrender, but rather to gain control of Lucenda because women are objects to control, not equal partners in a reciprocal relationship.

Elierso marries Lucenda in an attempt to cure his friend’s love sickness. Arnalte’s subsequent lethal rage toward Elierso for robbing him of his prize again illustrates his narcissistic need to control. In his mind, Elierso has betrayed him. Arnalte does not acknowledge that it was he who committed the first betrayal by telling his friend the secret of his romance in the first place. His rage runs wild because Elierso, in Arnalte’s mind, has stolen the control Arnalte labored so long to gain over Lucenda. “Y agora, de mí te encubriendo, por mugger la resceviste, faziéndote del galardón de mis trabajos poseedor” (209). Part of Arnalte’s self image includes the ideal of the hero (Ruiz Casanova 33), which contributes to his challenge to Elierso. In this case, however, their duel is not a battle between good and evil, but only a means of gaining control over the Lucenda trophy since mutuality and reciprocity are alien concepts for narcissists. Others exist only to agree, flatter, obey, and comfort (Hotchkiss 20). The more Lucenda refuses to do so, the more of a failure Arnalte feels, which in turn triggers a deeper desire to

obtain the flattery and surrender to which he feels entitled. He does not actually want her love but rather her acknowledgment that he is powerful, a need that is so tremendous that it induces his murderous craze.

Once again Lucenda's person is trivialized as Arnalte does not recognize the notion that perhaps Lucenda wanted to marry Elierso. He also does not appear to be aware of the courtly love ideal that it is better if the woman is married. Nonetheless, Lucenda's true feelings will remain a mystery as long as only Arnalte tells the story. That it was common in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that women, especially beautiful women, were obligated and at fault (Whinnom 60), bolsters the reflection of society's general narcissistic ideas toward women that San Pedro demonstrates, as well as the impossible position women had in that they could not help their friend without risking their own honor (Beysterveldt 77). Arnalte must annihilate those over whom he cannot gain control or face his own flawed humanity. He is not capable of or interested in having a romance considered perfect by the rules of courtly love. He kills Elierso because he destroyed all means for Arnalte to control Lucenda and eliminating his hope of relieving himself of his shame and rejection. He subsequently destroys Lucenda through his words while she retreats to a convent where she will remain unseen and where her voice is rendered but an echo in Arnalte's story.

San Pedro exemplifies clearly through this expansion on the story of Narcissus and Echo that the rules of courtly love promote narcissistic, hollow personalities, and destroy the expression of true human emotion and relationship. Arnalte is the perfect narcissist whose world consists only of two dimensional reflections of himself, serving well as a warning of the dangers of blindly adhering to society's conventions. He illustrates the imbalance in the system in that women may not express real thoughts and feelings, but can serve only as echoes of the narcissistic man society's conventions created. He also subtly pleads with the women of Queen Isabel's court to change society's conventions because in a world such as Arnalte's, love, real love, will never find expression.

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