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In Death, Immortality

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In Death, Immortality

A Senior Thesis Presented

By

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Advisor:

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
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Abstract

“We are like an admirable, wandering Numancia, who prefers to die gradually than to admit defeat” (translated from Alfonso Guerra’s documentary, *Exilio*). Uttered during the fall of the Republican government during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), Spanish author Luis Araquistáin’s ominous phrase not only speaks to the slow death of Republican hopes while in exile, but also hearkens back to a small town in the north of Spain that existed in the second century AD. Famed for its resistance to the advancing Roman armies, Numantia fell in 133 BC to Scipio Aemilianus who led the forces of the Roman Empire against the city and besieged it for eight months. Yet, even as late as the twentieth century in Spain, people could still hear references being made to this small town; the preservation of the memory of Numantia is largely due to the work of Miguel de Cervantes, who in the 1580s penned *El cerco de Numancia* (or simply, *La destrucción de Numancia*), a play based on the events of 133 BC. After Cervantes came multiple playwrights, poets, and even politicians who reinterpreted the play in various forms to communicate distinct messages. One of the most unique moments in the life of Cervantes’ *El cerco de Numancia* came during the Spanish Civil War; during this clash between visions of the future of Spain, both Republican forces and the *Nacionales* of Franco utilized the image of Numantia to motivate their constituents and sway others to their cause.

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Introduction

The cruel scythe of death shall work in vain,
And eke the flight of time, to hinder me
From sounding forth in song, without control,
Numantia's powerful arm, and constant soul!
In her alone I find such worth extreme
As claims a record in the proudest lays;
Such wealth of matter for the poet's theme,
That thousand ages may rehearse always
Her deathless courage, and her strength supreme,
Which claim in prose and verse the loftiest praise;
Tis mine, in trust, to garner so much glory,
And so give happy ending to our story!

--Fame, *Numantia: A Tragedy*, Miguel de Cervantes, translated by James Y. Gibson

Only in death can we become immortal. After we have passed from this world and the edges of memory have begun to fray then can we transcend our temporality and become eternal. Those who come after us are then tasked with the responsibility of capturing our essence with their words and deeds; truly centuries may pass before a worthy herald arrives to commit our stories to a historical record. Such was the case of Numantia, a small town whose ruins lie less than five miles outside of the town of Soria in present day Spain. After a year long siege and the grisly conclusion of the Roman-Numantine conflict in 133 B.C, the tragedy of Numantia, documented in great detail by the historian Appian of Alexandria, could have easily been overlooked as a small episode in a protracted, bloody conflict between the Romans and Iberian peoples. The Numantine chapter of the Celtiberian struggle, however, is now recognized as one of the crucial moments in the development of Spanish national identity. Looking to the unwavering Numantine resistance while on the very precipice of hell, Spaniards for centuries have been able to call forth their own immeasurable pride and courage in the direst situations.

Yet it is not the record according to Appian to which the Spaniards look; rather, they draw inspiration from *El cerco de Numancia* (referred to in this text as *La Numancia*), a dramatic

reimagining of the events of 133 B.C and one of few surviving plays by the famed Miguel de Cervantes. Arguably the greatest writer in Spanish history, Cervantes is most widely known for his epic novel, *Don Quijote de la Mancha*; however, many people might not realize that Cervantes also led a successful career as a playwright in Madrid until his death in 1615. His *Numancia*, first performed in 1586 in Madrid,¹ came only a few decades after the apogee of Spanish imperial power in the early 16th century. In his introduction to the 1885 English translation of the play, James Y. Gibson comments, “It was first produced in stirring times when the Spanish power, that had hitherto held mastery of the world, was showing symptoms of declining vigor.”² In the dialogue of the play, we can see multiple promises of everlasting glory for Spain, perhaps indirect exhortations to hold onto hope as the Spanish Empire was slowly being supplanted by English naval power towards the end of the sixteenth century. Through various interpretations both on and off of the stage, Numantia has become a source and symbol of Spanish pride and unwavering courage in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds.

The understanding of the play, however, and the function it fulfills in society is elastic; in order to address the fluctuations in understanding and function, it is necessary to examine the play during key moments of Spanish history. First, looking at the play when it was originally written and performed in the late 16th century, we can explore Cervantes’ rationale for reimagining the siege during the twilight of the Spanish Golden Age. Closely comparing Cervantes’ play to ancient sources and analyzing the points of intersection and divergence will contribute to our understanding of why Cervantes saw this battle as a crucial event for the development of Spanish national identity. Second, we can explore the use of both Cervantes’ play and the battle during possibly the lowest point in Spanish history—the Spanish Civil War.

¹ Miguel de Cervantes 1885, *Numantia: A Tragedy*, trans. James Y Gibson, London, p. vii.

² Cervantes 1885, p. xiv.

Little more than three centuries after Cervantes' work came to life, Spain would be completely turned on its head. With the loss of its final colonies in the Americas in 1898, severe economic problems, years of internal political strife, and even armed conflict within the nation, Spain was no longer a glorious empire at the vanguard of imperialism. In a bruised and broken country slowly trying to regain self sufficiency along with its self confidence, the Civil War was a time of violent struggle over drastically different visions of the future. As both sides fought in the streets, they also waged a strategic war over the markers of national identity. In addressing visions and usage of the play and of the idea of Numantia during this time period, it is necessary to also take into consideration the archaeological research on Numantia conducted during the early 20th century and to what extent (if at all) this work changed the perception of the play.

Chapter I

Cervantes' Citations

Given the theme of his play and the clear influence of Greek and Roman authors on the *Numantia*, we must wonder if at some point in his education, Cervantes came into contact with the texts themselves or with scholars who had heavily investigated them. As with his career as a playwright, however, little is known about his early years and schooling; in fact, many scholars debate on whether or not he had a formal education. It is possible that he learned from Jesuit scholars³; other writers claim that he was a pupil of the humanist Juan Lopez de Hoyos⁴ and later became a student at the University of Salamanca. Although Henry Edward Watts and John Parker Anderson, authors of the *Life of Miguel de Cervantes*, accept the idea that Lopez de Hoyos taught the young Cervantes, they reject the notion that he attended the University, let alone had the means to attend it.⁵ Waats and Anderson claim that his education ultimately came from the tutelage of Lopez de Hoyos and from his own voracious reading of Spanish literature and Italian poetry.⁶ If we assume that Cervantes was indeed trained by a humanist scholar such as Lopez de Hoyos, surely he would be familiar with the tale from antiquity.

From the remarkable correspondence between his play and Appian's *Iberike*, or *Wars in Iberia*, it is highly possible that Cervantes would have at least read Appian's account of Numantia. He seems to be one of the sources from which Cervantes directly draws. Written during the second century BC, the *Iberike* is one book of Appian's Roman History, an opus of twenty-four books that attempts to document the entirety of the Roman Empire; unfortunately,

³The Biography Channel website 2013. "Miguel de Cervantes" <http://www.biography.com/people/miguel-de-cervantes-9242997>.

⁴The History Channel website 2013, "Miguel de Cervantes is born," <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/miguel-de-cervantes-is-born>.

⁵Henry Edward Watts and John Parker Anderson 1891, *Life of Miguel de Cervantes*, London, p. 18.

⁶Watts and Anderson 1891, p.18.

like many great works from antiquity, only fragments of the Roman History survive.⁷ Providentially for us and for Cervantes, the *Iberike*, the sixth book in Appian's History, has survived in its entirety. It chronicles the wars on the Iberian Peninsula, beginning with the Punic wars in 218 BC, continuing to the capture of Numantia in 133 BC and ending briefly with the events that passed between that year and the rise of Augustus in 14 AD.⁸ The three major events of this book, namely the war against Carthage, the war against the Lusitanians, and the wars against the Celtiberians, are framed not only by geography and history of the peninsula, but also by the presence of two significant historical figures: Publius Scipio Africanus and Publius Scipio Aemilianus.⁹ The two Scipios conclude the key battles, namely the ejection of the Carthaginians from Iberia and the Numantine war, which lead to Rome's domination of the peninsula.

What is most interesting about Appian's work as a whole is the way in which he wrote it. Not only did he write his History with the intention of creating a literary piece, but he also wrote of the second Punic War without referencing either Polybius or Titus Livy, both of whom discussed the subjects covered at length in the History. In his commentary on Appian's *Iberike*, J.S. Richardson points out that Appian most likely drew on the same sources that Livy himself used (including Polybius).¹⁰ There has been debate as to whether or not Appian drew on Polybius for information on the Lusitanian and Numantine wars, but Richardson argues that it is more likely that Appian did not use Polybius as his only or primary source even if Appian did read his work. Although Appian does not explicitly list any of the Greek and Roman sources that he utilized to compile his History, in the *Iberike*, he points out Rutilius Rufus, a soldier and military

⁷ Appian 2000, Wars of the Romans in Iberia: *Iberike*, trans. J.S. Richardson, Warminster, p. 1.

⁸ Appian 2000, p. 177.

⁹ Appian 2000, p. 4.

¹⁰ Appian 2000, p. 4.

tribune under Scipio “who wrote a history of these exploits.”¹¹ It would be interesting to examine the inclusion of this detail in the light of the criticism that Appian receives from modern historians.¹²

As native of Alexandria living and working after the reign of Vespasian, Appian is an interesting figure. Although his work is filled with an “admiration of monarchy...and a desire to explain...the benefits of monarchy to the entire world,” according to Gregory S. Bucher, author of “The Origins, Program, and Composition of Appian's Roman History,”¹³ Appian does not hesitate to show his personal criticisms of the Roman administration. Focusing on the Iberike alone, his sometimes caustic characterizations of the Roman commanders and their soldiers show his distaste for the way that matters were handled on the Iberian Peninsula. For example, he describes Quintus Pompeius, a consul sent to quash the Numantine resistance, as “ashamed at the blunders he had made,”¹⁴ “afraid that he would be prosecuted,”¹⁵ and prone to making secret, “disgraceful” agreements with the Numantines that would not be upheld in the Senate at Rome.¹⁶ Another consul, Hostilius Mancius, later makes a similar secret agreement with the Numantines when he is surrounded by their forces, but he is soon replaced by his co-consul Aemilius Lepidus who must wait to hear Rome’s ruling on Mancius before proceeding. Lepidus, however, is impatient (described as one who “could not bear being idle”¹⁷) and instead spreads rumors to restart the war. Appian indirectly criticizes Lepidus for this action, saying, “for some sought the

¹¹ Appian 2000, p.93.

¹² For more information on scholarly debate over Appian as a source, see Gregory S. Bucher’s “The Origins, Program, and Composition of Appian's Roman History.” Source Link: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/284317>

¹³ Gregory S. Bucher 2000, “The Origins, Program, and Composition of Appian's Roman History.” *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 130, 429.

¹⁴ Appian 2000, p. 83

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Appian 2000, p. 85.

¹⁷ Ibid.

command for glory or gain or the honor of a triumph, not for the benefit of the city.”¹⁸ In his opinion, Lepidus was more concerned about the honors he would receive than the good he would bring to Rome. In other sections of the Iberike, Appian’s criticism is more direct; for example, in describing the deceitful actions of the praetor Galba in Iberia, he writes, “[Galba] paid back treachery with treachery, imitating barbarians in a way that was unworthy of the Romans.”¹⁹ He is also described as extremely greedy, so much so that “...not even in time of peace...did he abstain from lying and perjury for the sake of profit.”²⁰ Richardson argues that Appian’s criticism partly comes from his perspective as a Roman subject in the second century. As such, Appian might have believed that the Romans, who had periodically sent officials to Iberia since the end of the First Punic War, were already responsible for maintaining a previously organized part of their empire, as Egypt was in Appian’s time, instead of attempting to further subjugate the indigenous peoples in an ongoing process of conquest.²¹

Along with his disparagement of the Romans comes a certain degree of consideration towards the Numantines in their plight. Though he recognizes the Roman victory in the Numantine struggle as the climactic end of the war for Iberia, Appian does not allow his account to end on the high note of praise for Rome. To virtually sum up the Numantines, Appian writes:

“First of all, all those who wished to killed themselves, each in his own way; the rest came out on the third day to the place that had been appointed, an appalling spectacle and looking altogether inhuman, with their bodies unwashed, full of hair and nails and filth; they smelt horribly and their clothing was unwashed and just as stinking. To their enemies they seemed pitiable because of this; but their faces made them seem terrifying, for they looked at the Romans, in a way which expressed their pride and grief, what they had endured and the consciousness of their cannibalism.”²²

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Appian 2000, p. 67.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Appian 2000, p. 7.

²² Appian 2000, p. 101.

Not only does he vividly describe their physical appearance, but Appian also characterizes the Numantines as defiant and above all prideful in the presence of their conquerors. They are clearly not a people to be pitied, but admired.²³

This is the image supported by Lucius Annaeus Florus (and promoted by Cervantes in *La Numancia*), a Roman author of uncertain origin.²⁴ Given the overlap between certain details in the play and details included in Florus' work, it is highly likely that Florus was also a key primary source for Cervantes. Within the two books of his *Epitome of Roman History*, Florus attempts to fit the history of Rome from its foundation to the ascent of Augustus, largely focusing on the wars waged by the Romans; though he primarily cites from Livy, traces of other classical authors can be found throughout his work. Chapter 34 of Book 1 covers Florus' description of the Numantine War, which according to him lasted for eleven years, instead of Appian's fourteen.²⁵ Like Appian, Florus praises the bravery of the city's residents, valor that not only rivals that of great cities such as Carthage but also lifts Numantia to the position as "the greatest glory of Spain."²⁶ Florus similarly stresses the asymmetrical forces of the Romans and the Numantines; whereas the Romans numbered 40,000, the Celtiberian tribe amounted to only a tenth of that immense force.²⁷ For a moment, it seems as if Florus may be pitying the plight of the Numantines and is criticizing the Romans for fighting so unequal a battle; however, looking more generally at his work, it seems that he is only concerned by the inefficient nature of the

²³ This is somewhat reminiscent of Tacitus' tendency in the *Germania* to point out the ways in which the German lifestyle was almost more admirable than its Roman counterpart. Their simplicity, their morals, and their manly courage was similar to the values of earlier generations of Romans. For more information, see Ryan Michael Seeger's essay, "Romans and Barbarians in Tacitus' Battle Narratives."

http://atheneum.libs.uga.edu/bitstream/handle/10724/6190/seeger_ryan_m_200208_ma.pdf

²⁴ Different sources refer to him under multiple names, changing "Lucius" to "Publius," or "Annaeus" to "Annius." According to Jona Lendering, only his cognomen, "Florus," is always consistent. For more information, see: <http://www.livius.org/am-ao/annius/florus.html> and the introduction to Edward Seymour's translation for the Loeb Classical Library.

²⁵ Lucius Annaeus Florus 1929, *The Epitome of Roman History*, trans. Edward Seymour Forster, London, p 151.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

army before the arrival of Scipio Aemilianus. Again, Scipio ushers in order and prepares for an unquestionable and total victory (“...Scipio veram vellet et sine exceptione victoriam...”²⁸) over the Numantines. Scipio’s strategy, however, is thwarted by the dramatized collective suicide of the Numantines. In a rather magnanimous way, he commemorates the fall of Numantia with words that may have inspired Cervantes:

“All glory to a brave city, a city blessed, so it seems to me, even in its misfortunes; for it loyally helped its allies and with so small a force withstood for so long a period a people which was supported by the resources of the whole world. Having been finally overcome by the greatest of generals, it left the enemy no cause for exultation; for not a single Numantine was left to be led in triumph as a prisoner; the city, being poor, provided no spoil; their arms they themselves burned. Only the name of the city remained over which they could triumph.”²⁹

Perhaps looking at the example set by the Numantines prompted Florus’ subsequent accusation that as Rome expanded its territory and prestige, so too did the depths of its depravity. He writes, “Hitherto the Roman people had been glorious, illustrious, humane, upright and high-minded; the rest of their history during this period, though equally grand, was more disturbed and disgraced by the vices which increased with the very greatness of their empire...”³⁰ With this bold statement, Florus takes an anti imperialist, anti expansionist stance. If Cervantes did indeed draw on Florus as a primary source, we must wonder to what degree, if at all, this opinion was expressed in Cervantes’ play.

²⁸ Florus, *The Epitome of Roman History* 34.12

²⁹ Florus 1929, 157.

³⁰ Florus 1929, 157.

Historical Fact vs. Historical Fiction

Accepting his theoretical training in classical sources, we must wonder why Cervantes chose this particular direction for the play. In many instances, the play diverges from the historical record, for example, by omitting some historical figures and reinventing others, and by dramatizing the final resolution of the siege. Perhaps time did not allow Cervantes to explore the entire history of the Celtiberian conflict; perhaps the playwright was more focused on the symbolism of his work and saw certain details as superfluous or detrimental to his ultimate goal. Whatever his reasons, Cervantes chose to adapt history to his will and pen *La Numancia* with certain inconsistencies in the text; these gaps in the historical record serve as starting points for an analysis of the play's value as a symbol of national identity. First, however, we must examine where the play intersects then departs from classical sources.

In the opening of the play, Escipión³¹ laments that the Roman Senate has sent him to complete the subjugation of Numantia, a task which in his own words “quite unhinges [his] o’erburdened brain.”³² The general’s complaints against renewing the struggle in Numantia seem logical, considering the long history of intermittent warfare between the Romans and the inhabitants of the Iberian Peninsula. What did Numantia have that prevented Rome from conquering it until 133 BC? Perhaps its strength lay in its geographic location; Appian points out, “Numantia was difficult to reach because of two rivers and ravines, and thick woods surrounded it. There was only one route down to the plain, and it had been closed off with ditches and blocks of stone.”³³ The strategic location of the town in the center of northern Spain made it a primary

³¹ Unless otherwise noted, “Escipión” refers to the character in the play, whereas “Scipio” refers to the historical figure.

³² Cervantes 1885, p. 1.

³³ Appian 2000, p. 81.

stronghold to keep Roman forces at bay.³⁴ The town could also have been preserved by its cavalry and infantry whose “courage caused such great problems for the Romans.”³⁵ It is this strength of character that Cervantes tries to consistently convey in his play.

Given the fact that consuls, not praetors, had been sent periodically to calm the waves of conflict that washed over Iberia, Hispania was a primary location for military campaigns; “an endemic state of war provided an opportunity for personal and political advancement... the inability of successive Roman consuls to bring the war to a conclusion also made eventual victory that much more desirable.”³⁶ In his book, *A History of Spain: The Romans in Spain*, author J. S. Richardson lists the many consuls that are sent to the Spanish battlefield: Q. Fabius Aemilianus in 145 BC, Q. Fabius Maximus Servilianus in 145 BC, Q. Servilius Caepio (consul in 140), and Q. Pompeius in 141 among others.³⁷ In the first act of the *Numantia*, the Numantine ambassadors to Scipio cite these frequent consular incursions as reasons for their rebellion:

“[Numantia] says, that from the Roman Senate’s law
And rule, she never would have turned aside,
Had not some brutal Consuls, with their raw
And ruthless hands, done outrage to her pride.
[...]
With greedy lust, extending far and wide,
They placed upon our necks such a grievous yoke,
As might the meekest citizens provoke” (Cervantes 12)

According to Cervantes then, the Numantine people would have been accepting of Roman rule had not the consuls forgotten their duty to rule justly and instead overburdened the people out of greed for power and recognition. Not even the most timid citizen could bear this.

³⁴ Cervantes 1885, p. 119.

³⁵ Appian 2000, p. 87.

³⁶N.a. “The Celtiberian War and Numantia”

http://penelope.uchicago.edu/~grout/encyclopaedia_romana/hispania/celtiberianwar.html

³⁷ J.S Richardson 1996, *A History of Spain: The Romans in Spain*, Cambridge, MA, pp. 64-66.

By the time Scipio Aemilianus, conqueror of Carthage and consul in 134 BC, was put in charge of ending the Numantine resistance, however, he found that the Roman populace, especially the military, was weary of battle. Scipio remarks that the war has been raging for a “full sixteen years;”³⁸ however, according to the commentary of the text, the war lasted for fourteen years with the epic siege lasting for one year and three months.³⁹ Leonard A. Churchin, author of *Roman Spain: Conquest and Assimilation*, combines the Numantine War and the town’s siege with a series of revolts that occurred in 155 to 133 BC.⁴⁰ The soldiers stationed in Numantia, according to both the play and Appian’s *Iberike*, had indulged in debauchery and vice, which Scipio promptly tries to eliminate upon his arrival.⁴¹ He pares down the luxuries available in the soldiers’ camps; Appian reports that Scipio forbade the troops from having more than the bare necessities of life on the march. Not only does he forbid them from having real mattresses, he even restricts the type of food they can eat to “only boiled and roasted meat”⁴² and restricts them to “one drinking cup,”⁴³ a fact which Cervantes preserves in his text. Scipio’s stringency was meant to earn the soldiers’ respect; in the play, Cervantes adds another dimension to Scipio’s character by imbuing him with remarkable oratory skills.

Not only did Scipio bring moral order, he also brought with him a retinue of volunteer reinforcements; among these allied forces were included the Numidian soldiers led by Jugurtha. Richardson writes that the young prince and his cavalymen were on loan from the Numidian king, Micipsa.⁴⁴ The commentary of the play suggests that Micipsa saw Jugurtha as a threat to

³⁸ Cervantes 1885, p. 6.

³⁹ Cervantes 1885, p. 119.

⁴⁰ Churchin, L.A. 1991, *Roman Spain: Conquest and Annihilation*, Routledge, p. 33.

⁴¹ Appian 2000, p. 89.

⁴² Appian 2000, p.97.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Richardson 1996, p. 69.

his own sons' succession to the throne.⁴⁵ In *The Jugurthine War*, Sallust remarks that Jugurtha's popularity among the Numidian people was another concern for the aging Micipsa; he feared that if he managed to kill Jugurtha, the populace would revolt.⁴⁶ Micipsa then decided that in order to rid himself of Jugurtha without being suspected of foul play, he would send the prince to Numantia to aid the Roman effort; he hoped that Jugurtha "would certainly perish, either by an ostentatious display of his bravery, or by the merciless hand of the enemy"⁴⁷. Micipsa's schemes, however, were thwarted by Jugurtha's natural talent on the battlefield as well as his ability to create friendships with Scipio and the Roman soldiers.

What is interesting to notice is that in Cervantes' play, Jugurtha is not listed as a Numidian, but a Roman soldier. By doing so, we could argue that Cervantes is removing a layer of complexity from the conflict. The use of foreign aid in the battle points to the unpopularity of the struggle; there were not enough Roman soldiers willing to continue fighting. This casting also might be Cervantes' interpretation of the level of acceptance that Jugurtha enjoyed among the Romans. Sallust writes, "...he quickly rose, by great exertion and vigilance, by modestly submitting to orders, and frequently exposing himself to dangers...that he was greatly beloved by our men [and with] generosity of disposition, and readiness of wit...he united to himself many of the Romans in intimate friendship..."⁴⁸ Jugurtha seems to possess many of the qualities admired by Roman soldiers, making him, at least in Cervantes' estimation, "one of them." What do we make of this view of Jugurtha, given the fact that years later, he would be delivered in chains⁴⁹ to Gaius Marius as a captive and part of Marius' triumph over the Numidian army?

⁴⁵ Cervantes 1885, p. 118.

⁴⁶ Sallust 1899, *The Jugurthine War*, trans. Rev. John Selby Watson, M.A. New York and London, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0126%3Achapter%3D6>

⁴⁷ Sallust 1899 <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0126%3Achapter%3D7>.

⁴⁸ Sallust, 1899 <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0126%3Achapter%3D7>.

⁴⁹ Sallust, 1899

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0126%3Achapter%3D114>

Perhaps this was simply a missed opportunity on Cervantes' part to delve more deeply into a character's historical background.

The play also recalls a scene of negotiations between Escipión and the Numantine ambassadors, who in Appian's account are directed by Avarus, a Numantine leader. The two unnamed ambassadors explain the situation of the Numantines, tired of war but willing to continue fighting if Escipión will not enter into a peace treaty with them. They warn Escipión not only of the hidden strength of their army⁵⁰ but also of the dangers of his "false confidence."⁵¹ The ambassadors hint at the idea that Scipio's pride will drive them to take dire measures against him, saying, "And this bold arrogance which thou dost show/But nerves our arms to strike a harder blow."⁵² In the *Iberike*, Appian recalls Avarus' ominous advice to Scipio: "It is your choice, not ours, either to receive the surrender of the city, if your demands are moderate, or to watch its destruction as it resists you"⁵³. Avarus here wants Scipio to offer reasonable terms of surrender but does not explicitly threaten the Roman commander. In both the play and in the historical account, the Numantine attempts at diplomacy are met with Roman obstinacy. Scipio quickly rejects their entreaty which, at least in the world of the play, ultimately costs him a true victory.

What the *Numantia* does not delve into is the reception of the ambassadors at home. The people do not receive Scipio's rejection benevolently; in fact, according to Appian, consumed by their rage and a sense of betrayal, the Numantines "became completely inhuman. They killed Avarus and the five ambassadors who went with him as being the bearers of bad news and

⁵⁰ Cervantes 1885, p. 13: "By proofs unnumbered it is widely known/That still Numantia wields an arm of power."

⁵¹ Cervantes 1885, p. 14.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Appian 2000, p. 99.

perhaps having negotiated their own safety with Scipio.”⁵⁴ Nothing of the grace, unity, and perseverance of the Numantines of Cervantes’ play is seen here; instead Appian characterizes them as “terrible in their anger as a result of their unfettered freedom and unused to receiving orders...”⁵⁵ It is interesting to note that according to Richardson, this account of violence is found only in Appian’s work.

The most notable departure from Appian’s account is the conclusion of the *Numantia*: the collective suicide of the city’s inhabitants. In the play, the women inspire the thought of willingly perishing as a whole, some saying that they would prefer to die at their husbands’ sides and not have to bear sons in slavery. It is interesting to note that in Florus’ version, the women also prevent their husbands from fleeing Numantia by cutting the girdles of their horses, an act that is “summo scelere per amorem” (the highest crime for love).⁵⁶ Cervantes himself even references this point, making us believe that perhaps he was taking Florus’ account into greater consideration than that of Appian.⁵⁷ Nonetheless, for both Florus and Cervantes, the women, are driven to extremes by their emotions, particularly their love for their husbands. In the play, there is a dramatic unraveling of the city itself as everyone, amidst famine and sickness, hastens to destroy their valuable property and then to take their own lives. Some fall down dead from starvation while some throw themselves from buildings. In one particularly striking scene, a woman unwilling to die “in this dire extremity”⁵⁸ flees from a Numantine soldier with orders to kill the women of the town⁵⁹. Chaos ensues until all but one boy, Viriato, are dead. Viriato waits to end his life until Scipio has arrived in the city and realizes that there is no chance of taking any

⁵⁴ Appian 2000, p. 99 and 101.

⁵⁵ Appian 2000, p. 99.

⁵⁶ Florus, *The Epitome of Roman History*, 34.14.

⁵⁷ Miguel de Cervantes 1959, *The Siege of Numantia*, trans. Roy Campbell, Garden City NY, p. 131: “Caravino: When we had once decided before/Each one of us to trust in his swift horse/And make a dash for it, learning our drift/They were so vexed, they stole and hid our snaffles/So that we could not find a single one.”

⁵⁸ Cervantes 1885, p. 92.

⁵⁹ Ibid: “...it is the Senate’s stern command/That not one woman shall in life abide...”

treasures or slaves from Numantia. The boy pitching himself from atop a tower is a final blow to Scipio's pride; he laments, "For with thy fall thou hast upraised thy fame/And leveled down my victories to shame!"⁶⁰ Not only did he fail to definitively capture the city but he must recognize the valor in Viriato's death and admits his own defeat. He praises Viriato and remarks, "...thou hast conquered, by thy very fall/Him who in rising falleth worst of all."⁶¹ On top of this, the Numantines have effectively wrenched the pen from the hands of the Roman forces and written their own history; the Romans are only witnesses to their history, not the ones who created it. According to Barbara Simerka, author of *Discourses of Empire: Counter-Epic Literature in Early Modern Spain*, "...the proto-Spaniards seek to escape the fate of being the objects of inscription, to prevent the victorious Romans from controlling the commemoration of this event—in short, to rewrite the norms of historiography."⁶²

With the clear themes of patriotism and valor portrayed in the play, especially in this climactic scene, it is clear why Cervantes chose this ending for his play. Rather than acknowledge the Numantines' slow descent into madness, cannibalism, and their eventual surrender to Scipio as depicted by Appian,⁶³ Cervantes is able to transform the tiny town into a great emblem of Spanish pride, resistance, and determination, an image that is more in line with Florus' conclusion of the Numantine chapter in Roman history. Additionally, Cervantes may have been influenced by the abrupt conclusion to the conflict found in Livy's history of Rome. In Book LIX, Livy simply writes, "The Numantines reduced to the extremity of distress by famine, put themselves to death. Scipio having taken the city, destroys it and triumphs in the fourteenth

⁶⁰ Cervantes 1885, p. 115

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Barbara Simerka 2003, *Discourses of Empire: Counter-Epic Literature in Early Modern Spain*, University Park, PA, p. 82.

⁶³ Appian 2000, p. 101 and 103

year after the destruction of Carthage.”⁶⁴ He does not elaborate in the way that Appian does by mentioning those taken as slaves and by detailing what exactly Scipio did with the Numantine territory.

Collective suicide seems to be a theme found throughout classical sources. Even in the *Iberike* alone, there are multiple instances outside of the siege of Numantia wherein Rome’s opponents choose suicide over surrender. In a skirmish between the Bracari and the Roman forces in northwestern Spain during the Lusitanian War, the captured Bracari women, who are accustomed to fighting beside their husbands, choose to kill their children and themselves, “preferring death to slavery.”⁶⁵ Again, in another clash with bandits during the Celtiberian war, Q. Pompeius manages to capture a number of prisoners, but unsurprisingly, “The courage of the bandits was so great that none of those who were captured endured slavery, but some killed themselves, others those who had purchased them, and others sank the ships in which they were being transported away.”⁶⁶ It seems to be a salient characteristic of the Iberian people to see death as far more appealing than servitude.

Reading through the *Numantia*, scholars familiar with Josephus’ account of Masada would be able to draw parallels between the play and the ancient source; it is possible that Cervantes had been influenced by the text in some way. Masada, seen as a symbol of the ancient kingdom of Israel,⁶⁷ was also the site of a mass suicide committed as an act of defiance in the face of Roman invaders. According to the description of Masada by UNESCO, Masada has “emblematic value”⁶⁸ for the Jewish people today as the sanctuary of the last survivors of the

⁶⁴Livy 1850, *History of Rome by Titus Livius: the Epitomes of the Lost Books. Literally Translated, with Notes and Illustrations*, trans. William A. McDevitte, London, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0150%3Abook%3D59>.

⁶⁵Appian 2000, p. 77.

⁶⁶Appian 2000, p. 83.

⁶⁷UNESCO 2013, “Masada,” <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1040>

⁶⁸Ibid.

Jewish Revolt in 66 AD. In many ways, Masada can almost be seen as an equivalent to Numancia for the Jewish people; in the words of UNESCO, “The tragic events during the last days of the Jewish refugees who occupied the fortress and palace of Masada make it a symbol both of Jewish cultural identity and, more universally, of the continuing human struggle between oppression and liberty.”⁶⁹

Our primary classical source of the events at Masada comes from the Jewish scholar Flavius Josephus, who wrote during the first century AD.⁷⁰ According to Josephus, after Jerusalem fell and the Temple was destroyed by Titus in 70 AD,⁷¹ Masada was the place where the Jews made their last stand. With Eleazar Ben Yair as their leader, the Jews, much like the Numantines, prepared themselves for a protracted siege. When the walls of the city were breached in 73 AD,⁷² Eleazar Ben Yair is reported to have encouraged the 960 inhabitants to commit mass suicide. In book 7, chapter 9 of *The Wars of the Jews*, Josephus transcribes the tragic end of the city; his words echo Cervantes’ climactic scene. There is no hesitation among the men to slay their relatives; upon doing so, “...being not able to bear the grief they were under for what they had done any longer...they presently laid all they had in a heap, and set fire to it.”⁷³ As the city burns, the few men left alive draw lots to decide who would kill all the rest until no one, save one hidden family, was left alive.⁷⁴

The next day, the Romans are greeted with a scene that mirrors that which Scipio faced in the play: silence until two women, the matriarchs of the hidden family, come forth and report what had passed on the previous night. Full of disbelief, the Romans push their way through the

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Josephus 1987, *The Wars of the Jews*, trans. William Whiston, London,

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/maps/primary/josephusmasada.html>.

⁷⁴ Josephus 1987, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/maps/primary/josephusmasada.html>.

city to the main palace where they could see for themselves the bodies of the slain people. Josephus writes, “[the Romans] could take no pleasure in the fact, though it were done to their enemies. Nor could they do other than wonder at the courage of their resolution and the immovable contempt of death, which so great a number of them had shown...”⁷⁵ Like Scipio, the Roman invaders are forced to recognize both their own defeat and the valor of the Jewish people.

Although there is scholarly debate over the accuracy of Josephus’ account, it is the purpose of his work (as is the case with Cervantes’ *Numantia*) that is most important. Author Shaye Cohen and others like him would have us believe that Josephus wanted not only to create a dramatic end for this epic confrontation between the Jewish and Roman forces but also to send a specific message to his Jewish audience. In his article, “Masada: Literary Tradition, Archaeological Remains, and the Credibility of Josephus,” Cohen claims that by allowing Eleazar, the leader of the Sicarii, to publicly confess his errors, Josephus is showing the Jewish readers that “the way of the Sicarii is the way of death and that the theology of the Sicarii leads to renunciation of one of the core doctrines of Judaism, the eternal election of Israel.”⁷⁶ Josephus is sending a message that the mass suicide is part of the heavenly punishment owed to Eleazar and his followers, who incited the conflict. Regardless of whether or not this is true, it adds another interesting layer to our analysis of Cervantes’ *Numantia*. An examination of the historical context of Spain during the sixteenth century, particularly around the 1580s, may allow for more insight into Cervantes’ purpose in writing the play.

⁷⁵ Josephus 1987, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/maps/primary/josephusmasada.html>.

⁷⁶Shaye Cohen 1982, “Masada: Literary Tradition, Archaeological Remains, and the Credibility of Josephus,” *Journal of Jewish Studies: Essays in honour of Yigael* 33, 1982, From: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/portrait/masada.html>

Chapter II

The Blaze of Glory

The sixteenth century was both an era of rapid expansion and an age of decay for the Spanish Empire. The profound changes that united the empire and brought it to the vanguard of Europe, however, actually began in the late 15th century. In 1469, the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon were united by the marriage of the Catholic monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabel. With their union, the two sides of the Iberian Peninsula, excluding the present day Portugal, were combined into one kingdom. It is important to recognize, however, that although the monarchs had publicly united their households, both Castile and Aragon maintained separate governments and finances from each other; this division would only highlight the tensions that existed in the kingdom of Spain, tensions which persist to this day in the political structure of Spain. Columbus' subsequent 1492 exploration of the New World, a journey financed by the crown of Castile, similarly added prestige, territory and wealth to Spain. The conquest of the New World, which brought in raw materials and precious metals, also coincided with the completion of the Reconquista in 1493 wherein Isabel and Ferdinand expelled the last of the Moors in the "re-conquest" of the Iberian Peninsula. On the wave of these successes, Spain entered a Golden Age overseen by yet another pair of strong leaders: Charles V and Philip II. As Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V both expanded the territory of Spain overseas as well as in Europe and also increased the influence of Spain on the European political stage. His successor, King Philip II of Spain, shifted the focus of the empire from expansion to strengthening internal affairs. Nonetheless, when called to lead the European Holy League and wipe out the threat of the Ottoman Turks, Philip rose to the occasion. In 1571 at the battle of Lepanto, the combined European forces finally ended the struggle between Christians and Muslims that had been ongoing since the fall

of the Roman Empire.⁷⁷ Despite the achievements under these rulers, however, by the end of the sixteenth century, Spanish power, particularly in Europe was beginning to wane. The increasingly more advanced English navy began to supplant the Spanish Armada as the most formidable force on the seas. By the 1580s, the axes of power in Europe had shifted from the Catholic Christian states on the Mediterranean to the Protestant states of the north and east.⁷⁸ Spanish harbors in the New World had been repeatedly plundered by the English pirate, Sir Francis Drake as Philip II slowly attempted to organize a Spanish Armada to address the English threat on the seas.⁷⁹ Perhaps watching Spanish power ebb away inspired Cervantes, a soldier who had fought and been crippled at Lepanto, to write a play to remind his readers of Spain's former greatness.

After reading through *La Numancia*, we can come away with the assumption that Cervantes was writing a text solely meant to glorify his monarchs, his history, and Spain itself. His text is replete with references to the attainment of immortality and glory through death, and although the message is clear by the second act of the play, Cervantes takes care to reiterate this idea in every act. For example, in Act II, as the priests read the ill omens in flames and flocks of birds,⁸⁰ one priest comments, "Although the Romans get the victory/Through our destruction, yet the smoke will turn/To live flames, and our death and glory burn/Forever!"⁸¹ Clearly, death is not the end for Numantia. The imagery of the flames used here echoes the earlier lament of Spain (personified in the play) in Act I; she remarks, "...I feel the end is coming there,/Where

⁷⁷ Andrew C. Hess 1972, "The Battle of Lepanto and Its Place in Mediterranean History" *Past & Present* , 57, p. 53., <http://www.jstor.org/stable/650416> p.53.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ De Lamar Jensen 1988, "The Spanish Armada: The Worst-Kept Secret in Europe," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* , 19, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2540990>, p. 628.

⁸⁰ It is interesting to note that in the play, not only does the augury remind readers of the Roman practice, the gods of the Numantines, a group indigenous to Spain, are also known by Roman names.

⁸¹ Cervantes 1959, p.120.

[Numantia] will end her life, but not her fame,/ And, like a Phoenix, be renewed by flame.”⁸² Again and again, Cervantes reminds us of the renewal of Numantia through her immortal fame, a sentiment that becomes like a refrain in the sad tale. In Act III, before the Numantine leader Theogenes proposes his desperate plan of mass suicide, he remarks that if everyone consents to the plan, “A hundred thousand years will seem a day/To our immortal fame.”⁸³ Interestingly enough, Simerka argues that not only is this quotation part of a “metahistorical commentary,” but also may be part of the desire to influence the historical record. This desire may have emerged as a response to the “Black Legend,” according to Simerka; within Protestant spheres, Spanish imperial conquests were depicted as barbarous rather than courageous.⁸⁴ Many conquistadors themselves actually wrote letters to sway public opinion on their triumphs and to guide later commemorations of their accomplishments.⁸⁵

Returning to the play, we once again see the image of flames as Theogenes suggests that everything of value in Numantia should be burned in an enormous fire in the center of the city. The literal conflagration of the city and the promised perennial blaze of glory are conflated in this moment. Finally, in Act IV, after the last living Numantine Bariatius throws himself from a tower in front of Scipio’s army, Fame herself appears to conclude the play, bidding, “Go forth, my voice, in accents sweet and low,/From race to race, and kindle as you go,/In every soul, a burning wish to keep/Deathless the memory of so brave a leap.” As she promises to spread the fame of Numantia throughout the world, Fame again brings back the imagery of flame and future glory that weaves its way throughout the entire text; it is clear that the Numantine sacrifice will transcend time.

⁸² Cervantes 1959, p. 110.

⁸³ Cervantes 1959, p. 135.

⁸⁴ Simerka 2003, p. 83.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

Cervantes' praise for the Spanish monarch, Philip II is also explicitly seen throughout the text. In a prophecy of the future of Spain, the personified river Duero in *La Numancia* plainly states, "But he whose hand will raise to the greatest height/[Spain's] honor...Making the valor and the name of Spain/Above all countries show most plain/Will be a king...called, by name, Philip the Second,/And nearly all the world as his be reckoned."⁸⁶ Cervantes does not let the reader guess at who this "king" might be; he candidly inserts Philip's name as if to dispel any doubt.⁸⁷ Again in Act IV, Cervantes makes a plain reference to the kings who will bring Spain to its greatest, enduring glory: "Philip, Charles the Fifth and Ferdinand."⁸⁸ By naming these kings, Cervantes seems to be dedicating his work to them and their great accomplishments which led to the Spanish Golden Age, characterized in the play as a reversal of the destinies of Rome and Spain. This turnaround is another theme that is repeated throughout the play; turning to the prophecy of the river Duero once more, we see a clear reversal of fates; Duero overtly promises, "The time will come when fate will swivel round/Their two Protean destinies: the Roman/Will be oppressed by his now prostrate foeman."⁸⁹ To further cement this image later on in his proclamation, Duero declares, "...as the Lord/Of Rome, the Spaniard will uphold his sword/Over the Roman's neck, bent in submission,/Who can scarce breathe except by his permission."⁹⁰ While it is unclear who exactly this "Lord of Rome" might be in chronology provided by Duero, we could argue that this is a reference to Charles V, father of Philip II and Holy Roman Emperor. As guardian of Christendom and the approved champion of the pope in the temporal realm, the

⁸⁶ Cervantes 1959, p. 113.

⁸⁷ The scene in which the ultimate destiny of Spain is revealed is somewhat reminiscent of Book 6 of the Aeneid wherein Anchises explains to Aeneas his lineage and the coming Golden Age of Rome. In particular, the explicit reference to Philip II calls to mind the reference that Anchises makes to Augustus and (to a lesser degree) Marcellus, who would have been the glory of the Roman Empire. Among other moments in the play, this moment makes me believe that Cervantes was also drawing on Vergil as a literary model.

⁸⁸ Cervantes 1959, p. 148.

⁸⁹ Cervantes 1959, p. 112.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

Holy Roman Emperor would certainly have power in Rome itself; however, as the office was expanded through Charles' successful endeavors in the New World and across Europe, it became clear that the Emperor held far more power than anticipated. Over time, his influence overshadowed the power of the pope; perhaps Cervantes is alluding to this situation, implying that "the Roman" could be Pope Clement VII, who ultimately fled Rome while the seditious troops of Charles V sacked Rome in 1527, events referenced by Cervantes in the play.⁹¹

Even the portrayal of Escipión in contrast to the Numantines lends itself to the argument that this text is meant to glorify Spain. Although like his historical antecedent he comes to the battlefield with the intention of reforming the army and concluding the Numantine affair, Escipión has an unexpected hint of greed. Although he claims that he intends to bring down Numantia to bring all Spain under the subjection of the Roman Senate, in his attempts to steer Bariatus away from suicide, Escipión shows his personal focus is to have a triumph in Rome. When Escipión and his soldiers first scale the walls of Numantia to investigate the hideous shrieks and the rising flames emanating from within the city, he remarks, "If only one of them/Is left alive, then they will not deny me/A triumph back in Rome for having tamed/So proud a nation..."⁹² However, his hopes are momentarily dashed when Gaius Marius proclaims that there are no survivors, thus "cheating" Escipión of his winnings and triumph; however, when Jugurtha spies Bariatus preparing to leap from the tower, Escipión repeats his sentiment: "[A live Numantine] will be worth/A triumph over the Numantine nation/In Rome. Why, it's the thing I prayed for most!" For Escipión, the promised glory, not the service to his country is far more appealing, so much so that instead of earning his "victory" in open combat, he attempts to entice the boy with future freedom, jewels, and treasures which he ultimately rejects. Escipión had

⁹¹ Ibid. "...other strangers yet/Even into the Vatican will get,/the pilot of the sacred ship to fright/To foreign lands, an exile, taking flight."

⁹² Cervantes 1959, p. 155.

clearly convinced himself of future fame that would erase any shame in using trickery instead of hand to hand combat.⁹³ Earlier in the play, Caravino, a Numantine ambassador, also plainly criticizes Escipión's use of "base cunning [rather than] bravery."⁹⁴ Lobbing a series of scathing insults at Escipión, Caravino accuses Escipión of having no pride in having a one on one match with a Numantine soldier and of not living up to the greatness of his name; in his invective against Escipión, Caravino characterizes all Romans as the basest of cowards who will someday bend to Numantia's (by now understood as a synonym for Spain's) power. In depicting the enemies of Spain in such a negative light, Cervantes reserves the positive, honorable characteristics for his home country, represented by his Numantine ancestors.

⁹³Cervantes 1959, p 130 ("[Whatever shame there may be] all that will be whisked off by the wind/When this great victory restores my fame!")

⁹⁴ Cervantes 1959, p. 130.

Reading between the Lines

Despite these straightforward interpretations, however, Aaron M. Kahn, author of *The Ambivalence of Imperial Discourse*, offers us another reading the *La Numancia*. In his book, the result of his doctoral thesis, he argues that Cervantes actually wrote *La Numancia* as a means of indirectly criticizing tyrannical imperialism, the actions of the monarchy of Philip II, and even the Roman Catholic Church itself. If we accept the idea that the Roman forces within the play, the oppressors, are substitutes for the imperialist forces of Philip II, then the criticism is made plain; greed for conquest will lead to one's own downfall. Kahn suggests that Philip's annexation of Portugal in 1580 among other imperial measures opposed Cervantes' vision of "just action," or rightful and moral expansion in the context of creating an empire.⁹⁵ Analyzing the theme of destiny, Kahn argues that destiny, synonymous with fortune or fate, is inherently just, and those who oppose it suffer moral punishment; the Numantines accept their fate and receive eternal glory, whereas Escipión tries to fight destiny and is robbed of any type of reward.⁹⁶

Similar criticism of military action, according to Simerka, can be found in the interactions between Escipión and his soldiers. Though Escipión reprimands the Roman soldiers for the vice and laziness that has spread among them, referring to them as "...reared in Britain/Or by Flemish sires...begot!"⁹⁷ Not only are we to understand that these groups would have been considered barbarians by the Romans, Simerka also points out that they were the main groups that fought against Spain in its efforts at expansion.⁹⁸ Although Simerka presents an interesting argument that Escipión himself could be interpreted as a criticism of the lack of

⁹⁵ Aaron M. Kahn 2008, *The Ambivalence of Imperial Discourse: Cervantes' La Numancia within the 'Lost Generation' of Spanish Drama (1570-90)* Oxford, p. 25.

⁹⁶ Ibid. and Kahn, p. 27.

⁹⁷ Cervantes 1959, 103.

⁹⁸ Simerka 2003, 97.

capable military leaders, it seems more important, and more likely, that his address to the soldiers could serve as a call for Spanish soldiers and generals to improve themselves at a time when imperial power was beginning to falter.⁹⁹

Ultimately, Kahn posits that even if Cervantes did not intend for his play to be used as a tool to condemn political, economic, military, or cultural hegemony, by examining the various interpretations of Cervantes' text on and off of the stage, we can find evidence in favor of a theory of anti-tyranny.¹⁰⁰ Even though this does not specifically support the understanding of the play as an anti-imperialist work (after all, how a later author re-imagines a text does not necessarily have to be in line with the author's original vision), it is clear that *La Numancia* became a symbol to incite groups of people to societal change and even open rebellion throughout history.

Only a few decades after Cervantes crafted his first known version of *La Numancia*, Francisco de Rojas Zorilla published his own two part interpretation of the siege and fall of Numantia: *Numancia cercada* and *Numancia destruida*. As Cervantes' *La Numancia* disappeared until 1784 when it was first published by Sancha of Madrid without any indication of where the text had originated, it is hard to say whether or not Cervantes directly influenced Rojas Zorilla's version, supposedly issued in 1630.¹⁰¹ In this version, according to Kahn, anti-imperialist attitudes can be found in symbols throughout the book; for example, when an eagle removes a laurel wreath from the head of a Numantine soldier, Kahn interprets this action as Rome's approaching conquest of the city.¹⁰² In 1775, Ignacio López de Ayala published his

⁹⁹ Simerka 2003, 99.

¹⁰⁰ Kahn 2008, p. 29.

¹⁰¹ Cervantes 1885, p. xvii.

¹⁰² Kahn 2008, p. 30.

Numancia destruida in opposition to the absolute monarchy of King Ferdinand VII of Spain.¹⁰³ Finally in the twentieth century, Rafael Alberti would create his *Numancia: tragedia: adaptación y versión actualizada de La destrucción de Numancia, de Miguel de Cervantes* as an undoubtedly anti-fascist, anti-Franco discourse.¹⁰⁴ These are only a few of the numerous versions of *La Numancia* that have arisen from Cervantes' text over the past few centuries—poems, short stories, and other plays have been written and performed around the world by authors and actors whose aim was and is to call for change, resistance, and liberty in the face of oppression. Although it is not the purpose of this work to compare and contrast Cervantes' play with its many descendants, it would be an interesting exercise to compare and contrast Cervantes' *La Numancia* with a version created in the 21st century outside of Spain.

Still, we cannot completely dismiss the clear exultation of the Spanish Empire and of future glory throughout Cervantes' work. Perhaps it is more beneficial to, instead of choosing one interpretation over the other, allow for ambiguity in Cervantes' text and examine the work as both a praise of the Spanish Empire and its people specifically, but as a criticism of blind greed manifested through imperial conquest. This ambiguity is further complicated when we consider the fact that in the play the Numantines, ancestors of the Catholic Spaniards living in the sixteenth century, worshipped pagan gods, practiced necromancy, cannibalized their own people, and ultimately committed suicide,¹⁰⁵ "sins" that characterized more "barbaric" tribes, such as the indigenous peoples in the Americas, largely under Spanish control by the end of the sixteenth century. Taking verbal subtleties and the versatility of characters, we come to understand that there is ultimately no set interpretation of this text. We can argue, nonetheless, that Cervantes'

¹⁰³ Kahn 2008 p. 31.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Simerka 2003, p. 96.

text was clearly understood as resistance to injustice, a call for the oppressed to make a stand against their oppressors—whether foreign or Spanish.

Chapter III

Numantine vs. Numantine

On July 17, 1936, Spaniards would be called to make a stand against each other, as soldiers led by General Francisco Franco attempted to carry out a coup d'état to eliminate the Second Republic of Spain. In this moment, it seemed as if the destiny of Spain had once again turned itself on its head. For multiple reasons, ranging from bitterness at the loss of Cuba, the last of the Spanish colonies in the Americas, to resentment at the various social, economic, and military reforms proposed by the Republicans, Franco and his supporters, *los Nacionales*, tried to wrest power away from the legitimate government. Although the coup was successful in certain areas of Spain such as Galicia, Castilla-León, and Navarra, it failed in key places such as Catalonia, the Basque country, and notably in the capital, Madrid.¹⁰⁶ At this partial failure, the coup devolved into a bloody civil war spanning three years, ultimately concluding on April 1, 1939 when Franco's troops entered Madrid.¹⁰⁷ In the midst of the bloodshed from 1936 to 1939, and even afterwards, through various propaganda ploys developed in literature, film, and the media, both Republicans (supported by anarchists, communists, and socialists) and *Nacionales* (supported by the military and the church) alike also waged a psychological war as they promoted their own understanding of a common national identity.

According to Jose Ignacio de la Torre Echávarri, author of "El Pasado y la identidad española, el caso de Numancia," identity can be understood as "the image that a people or a nation has for itself, traits that over centuries of existence have created a sense and consciousness of belonging to the same place, sharing the same history, and participating in the same

¹⁰⁶ Juan Carlos Ocaña 2005, "La sublevación militar. El desarrollo de la guerra civil. Evolución política de las dos zonas durante la guerra civil," <http://www.historiasiglo20.org/HE/14a-1.htm>.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., <http://www.historiasiglo20.org/HE/14a-2.htm>

destiny.”¹⁰⁸ Considering the popularity that *La Numancia* had acquired over the past few centuries, it seemed logical that it would be one of the major tools for creating a cohesive narrative for Spain amidst a divisive war. Numantia would have been especially visible during the Spanish Civil War because of the 1905 excavation of its ruins by German archaeologist, Adolf Schulten. Many other scholars and researchers as early as the seventeenth century had attempted to ascertain the location of the ruins of Numantia based on information from classical sources, but after numerous “failures” (one of which, ironically, revealed an ancient *Roman* city), the location of the city was still a mystery. Over 22 months spread out between 1905 and 1912, however, Schulten uncovered the lost Numantia—underneath the previously discovered Roman city.¹⁰⁹ Now Numantia was a tangible place, not a place that existed only in legend. According to Michael Dobson, who chronicles and analyzes Schulten’s achievements in *The Army of the Roman Republic: The 2nd Century BC, Polybius and the Camps at Numantia, Spain*, Schulten’s discovery helped to “...stir Spanish national pride, [such] that within 12 days of [his] excavations commencing, the Spanish king declared an obelisk as a national monument on the hill.”¹¹⁰ His excavation, however, had unintended side effects; Dobson points out, “[there was] growing opposition by the Spanish to a foreigner excavating their ‘sacred’ site;” in this instance, we can see the interplay between archaeology and nationalism.¹¹¹ Matters became even more tense in April 1906 when Schulten was denied further funding as well as permission to continue his work and told that only the Comisión de Monumentos in Soria (the province in which the ruins of Numantia are located) would be allowed to continue excavating the site. With some help from

¹⁰⁸ Jose Ignacio de la Torre Echávarri, “El Pasado y la identidad española, el caso de Numancia,” p. 1. (“...la imagen que el pueblo o la nación tienen de sí mismo, los rasgos que a lo largo de siglos de existencia han configurado un sentimiento y una conciencia de pertenecer a un mismo lugar, compartir una misma historia, y de participar de un mismo destino.”)

¹⁰⁹ Michael Dobson, 2008, *The Army of the Roman Republic: The 2nd Century BC, Polybius and the Camps at Numantia, Spain*, Oxford, p. 14.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

Edoardo Saavedra, an antiquarian and engineer, Schulten was ultimately able to continue his work, though he regarded the Spanish excavations as the “second destruction of Numantia [destroying] more than Scipio had done.”¹¹²

With the recent excavations in mind, both sides began to interpret the symbol of Numantia in their favor. An online article, “Abuso historiográfico de Numancia,” jokingly states, “Durante la guerra los “numantinos” lucharon en ambos frentes, ya que el Ejército Republicano organizó en la provincia de Soria el Batallón de Numancia; mientras que en el Ejército Nacionalista se creó el Tercio de Requetés Numantinos.” (“During the civil war, “Numantines” fought on both sides; the Republican Army already organized the Battalion of Numantia in the province of Soria while in the Nationalist Army, the Third Numantine Regiment was created.”)¹¹³ (This reference can also be found in Echávarri’s work.) The political word play went further; in 1936 when the Nacionales captured the town of Azaña, reminiscent of the republican president Manuel Azaña, they renamed it to Numancia de la Sagra, simultaneously eliminating the republican association as well as recycling the well known name of Numantia. Such usage of the name was especially widely seen after the war, as the government, through the church, began to focus more on educating Spanish youth, inculcating them with the values of Franco’s new Spain. In books published for schooling, such as *Numancia, Espiritu de una raza*,” not only do the ancient Numantines become the “racial basis for the grand Spanish family,”¹¹⁴ their tale becomes justification for the new regime and encourages patriotism.¹¹⁵ In “El mito de Numancia y las enseñanzas numantinas,” Echávarri argues that this direction for teaching led to the abandonment of historical reality, creating clear errors in teaching; for example, the length of

¹¹² Ibid., 17.

¹¹³ N.a. 2004, “Abuso historiográfico de Numancia,” <http://www.celtiberia.net/articulo.asp?id=913>

¹¹⁴ Qtd in. Echávarri, p. 24.

¹¹⁵ Echávarri, p. 25.

the Numantine war and siege lasted anywhere from 9 to 18 years in some accounts.¹¹⁶ More emphasis is placed on the Numantines' bravery and love of both freedom and the fatherland.¹¹⁷ It seems as if dictatorship preferred the surface reading of Cervantes, glorifying Spain versus indirectly criticizing oppression. Under Franco, we see a departure from the common interpretation of *La Numancia* as a call for resistance.

This latter version of *La Numancia* is the one to which the Republicans clung during the war. For them, *La Numancia* and the memory of the Numantine resistance particularly came to life on two occasions: during the siege of Madrid and in Rafael Alberti's *Numancia: tragedia: adaptación y versión actualizada de La destrucción de Numancia, de Miguel de Cervantes* performed in 1937 in Madrid. In November of 1936, the Battle of Madrid began, much like the siege of Numantia; Madrid seemed poised to fall into the hands of Franco's militarily superior forces and thereby guarantee his victory over Spain. Still, in the face of this threat, the labor unions in Madrid roused the people to defend their city, raising their battle cry of "¡No Pasarán!" (They will not pass!)¹¹⁸ Like the Numantines, they firmly stand their ground and will even fight should the enemy engage them in on the battlefield. With aid from the International Brigades, largely composed of Russian communists, the people resisted Franco's troops despite air raids and open battles; even his frontal assault failed, forcing him to ultimately lay siege to the city and wait out his opponents.¹¹⁹ Internal divisions within the republican forces, however, would ultimately weaken the Republican resistance across the country and assure victory for Franco. On March 28, 1939, Franco took Madrid, and on April 1, 1939, officially concluded the war.

¹¹⁶ Jose Ignacio de la Torre Echávarri, "El mito de Numancia y las enseñanzas numantinas," <http://www.artehistoria.jcyl.es/v2/contextos/12614.htm>

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ocaña 2005, "La sublevación" <http://www.historiasiglo20.org/HE/14a-2.htm>

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

It would have been impossible for the besieged citizens of Madrid to miss the parallels in their situation to that of the Numantines; if by some chance they did, Rafael Alberti produced his play as a reminder during Christmas 1937. In his words “[como] poeta y militar, se hubiera sentido orgulloso de asistir a la representación de su tragedia a poca distancia de las trincheras enemigas...-en un teatro de Madrid!, a poco más de dos mil metros de los cañones facciosos y bajo la continua amenaza de los aviones italianos y alemanes” (as a poet and a soldier one should be proud to attend a performance of one’s tragedy within walking distance of the enemy trenches—in a theater in Madrid! A little more than two meters from the restless guns and under the constant threat of Italian and German planes.)¹²⁰ Not only does Alberti mean to rally his comrades, but he also makes blatant criticisms of the present situation. Kahn points out that after Alberti is exiled, he stages the play yet again in 1943 in Montevideo, Uruguay as a “symbol of freedom in theater [with important] social value.”¹²¹ In his interpretation of the play, Alberti largely removes disparaging characterizations of the Numantines; for example, he omits Escipión’s references to them as “beasts” and his mention of their horrific starvation.¹²² In costuming the play in 1937, according to Kahn, Alberti has the Roman soldiers wear dark uniforms similar to those of Mussolini, Franco’s fascist ally and current dictator of Italy.¹²³ With such clear political statements, it is clear that for Alberti and his audience, the Numantia was understood as a symbol of resistance, not merely a glorification of history and empire.

¹²⁰ Qtd, Echávarri, “El mito,” <http://www.artehistoria.jcyl.es/v2/contextos/12614.htm>.

¹²¹ Kahn 2008, p. 31. For a more information on Alberti’s performance, see the article, “Collective Suicide: Rafael Alberti’s Updating of Cervantes’s “La destrucción de Numancia”” by Derek Gagen, 2008, in *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 103, No. 1. URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20467627>.

¹²² Kahn 2008 p. 32.

¹²³ Ibid.

Conclusion

Examined from a literary and historical perspective, the battle of Numantia is one of the most significant developments in the history of Roman Iberia; it was and still is a prominent symbol of nationalism and conquest. However, it is not so much the specific details of the historical record that are vital to the Spanish imagination; rather it is the ideals and values communicated through the Numantine efforts that are most important. An in-depth analysis of primary sources available to Cervantes allows us to see not only what information may have inspired his work, but also what literary tropes from classical antiquity may have inspired his writing. Understanding this also adds in our appreciation of his play as a tool to preserve information from the earliest written histories of civilization. Then, considering *La Numancia* in the context of his own time allows us to make hypotheses about his true purpose in writing the play. Was it an impoverished writer's attempt to make money? Was it a former soldier's dedication to his sovereign and empire? Was it a skillful critic's subtle warning against imperialism and chastisement of greed? Could it have been all? As we do not have the means to ask the author himself, the best we can do is interpret the play for ourselves, as hundreds of scholars, writers, artists, and politicians have done in Spain and around the world since the Spanish Golden Age. For as many reviews that hail *La Numancia* as a testament to the greatness of Spain and the glory of empire, there are just as many that see it as a universal symbol of resistance to oppression, even the oppression wrought by fellow countrymen. This was the view adopted by the Republican forces during the Spanish Civil War as they fought for their right to exist in the future Spain. Recognizing the importance and power that the memory of Numantia held in the Spanish imagination, Franco and his supporters also utilized and manipulated discourse and imagery about Numantia in their operations during the war and in its aftermath.

What is most important to remember is that Numantia continues to be alive today through various interpretations around the world; slowly, but steadily the English speaking world is also beginning to appreciate both the historical relevance of Numantia and the literary value of Cervantes' text and its descendants. Perhaps now as questions rise on how the area surrounding the ruins of Numantia should be developed, more people will be led to consider the value of the site to not only Spain, but people around the world inspired by the city's epic tale.

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