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Siege as Spectacle in Cervantes's *La Numancia*

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This article argues that Cervantes's early play, *La destrucción de la Numancia*, appealed to a public avid for a front-row seat at that most static, yet also most savage of early modern spectacles: the military siege. With the advent of the star fort or *traza italiana*, the focus of military strategy during Cervantes's lifetime moved away from open field skirmishes toward the attack and defense of heavily fortified citadels. The most effective means for overpowering such a fort was to block its trade routes by laying a siege. This shift from offensive to defensive warfare generated fearful scenarios throughout northern Europe, the Mediterranean, and the New World that inspired painters, poets, and dramatists alike. Cervantes's *La Numancia* stages identifiable features of positional warfare—its implacable logic, its engineering, and its toll in human suffering—as visual, rhetorical, and dramatic tropes that promised to regale theatergoers and readers with the awesome spectacle of siege.

—España mi natura, Italia mi ventura, ¡Flandes mi sepultura!
(Popular song, qtd. in Cervera)

—When you resorted to force, ... you didn't know where you were going. If you got deeper and deeper, there was just no limit except ... the limitations of force itself. (General Dwight D. Eisenhower, qtd. in Walzer 23; qtd. in Hillman 55)

MIGUEL DE CERVANTES'S *La destrucción de la Numancia* (circa 1580) both provokes and delights. The play's vexing ideological indeterminacy provokes ongoing contestation among critics and scholars. Directors too must confront the fact that Cervantes's early play “no está desprovista de cierta ambigüedad prestándose así a lecturas y adaptaciones contrapuestas” (Waltheus 131). Yet, if *Numancia* does not exactly communicate or represent, what does it deliver to its audiences and readers instead? I would argue with Lope that theatrical works are objects of consumption that exist to delight audiences and readers. What, then, was the topical appeal of *Numancia* for its late sixteenth-century public? Emerging from the Italian wars, threatened militarily on the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, and pursuing aggressive campaigns in Northern Europe, early modern Spain was bellicose to its core. Certainly Cervantes's *Numancia* promised to satisfy public taste for martial tableaux. More precisely, *Numancia* gave audiences a front-row seat at that most novel and savage product of the gunpowder revolution: the military siege. Weaponry, however, is not the star of Cervantes's show. Instead, *Numancia* exposes the human cost of military blockade for attackers and

defenders alike. As the following pages demonstrate, the poetics and structure of Cervantes's play recast the spatial-temporal impasse of protracted siege as an entertaining spectacle.

Tragedy or Tragicomedy?

It will be useful to begin by recalling primary currents of critical dissent that Cervantes's play has provoked in recent decades. As noted above, there is little consensus as to what Cervantes achieves within the dramatic framework of *Numancia*.¹ As historical drama, the play represents general Scipio Aemilianus's decision in 130 BCE to terminate a sixteen-year conflict between the Roman legions advancing northward through the Iberian Peninsula and Numancia, an Iron Age Celtiberian hill fort located in the Soria region of north-central Spain. Instead of prevailing by the sword, a costly and thus-far ineffective strategy, Scipio turned to the spade, ordering his men to dig a moat ringed by a palisade guarded by high watchtowers to starve the stubborn Numantine insurgents into surrender. As the Roman historian Florus relates, to the besieged Celtiberian garrisons, "ready though they were to die, no opportunity was given ... of fighting" (1.34.13). What Scipio did not calculate, however, was that the Numantines would snatch glory, if not victory, from their hands by performing a final act of collective defiance. After burning their remaining possessions, the Numantines resolved to kill each other and themselves rather than fall into Roman hands. Cervantes credits the dramatic character Teógenes with spearheading this plan:

Sólo se ha de mirar que el enemigo
no alcance de nosotros triunfo o gloria;
antes ha de servir él de testigo
que apruebe y eternice nuestra historia;
y si todos venís en lo que digo,
mil siglos durará nuestra memoria,
y es que no quede cosa aquí en Numancia
de do el contrario pueda hacer ganancia.
En medio de la plaza se haga un fuego,
en cuya ardiente llama licenciosa
nuestras riquezas todas se echen luego ... (1418–26)²

In Cervantes's play, Scipio's military triumph rings hollow, diminished by the appalling toll of human suffering that the Roman blockade inflicts and further muted by the gruesome scene of self-immolation that greets the conquering legions once they finally breach the fortress walls.

Modern appraisals of the play wrestle principally with its ambivalent representation of both the zealous Celtiberian insurgency and the ironclad logic of the conquering Romans, and with the equally perplexing question of genre. Regarding the play's ideological allegiance, does *Numancia* allusively champion Philip II of Spain's imperial agenda, or does it critique the wages of Spain's many bellicose engagements of the late sixteenth century?³ Does the play absolve Rome or condemn its implacable methods? Does it suggest that Spain (Numancia) could only prevail over its enemies once it abandoned its pagan gods and adopted Catholicism? Did Cervantes's play owe its success to

the early modern public's prior knowledge of the Celtiberian war, or rather, to Cervantes's creative remixing of those events with other genres (chronicle, historical romance, epic, Senecan tragedy)?

Critics also debate whether *La destrucción de la Numancia* is a tragedy or a tragicomedy. In light of *Numancia*'s apocalyptic ending, Jesús Maestro considers the play among "the most contemporary and perfect tragedies of Western literature and theater" (125). Furthermore, since humans alone precipitate the calamity that befalls Numancia, Maestro considers it "a decide tragedy" that marks the dawn of modernity (125, 126). Frederick de Armas argues that Cipión rather than the defeated Numantine populace represents the play's most tragic figure ("Classical" 40), while Jane Tar categorizes the play as one of "double hamartia," to the extent that both Cipión's and the Numantines' misunderstandings of their circumstances lead to tragic outcomes with direct parallels to Habsburg Spain (60). Edward Friedman deems the play tragic and compares *Numancia* favorably to four other sixteenth-century Spanish tragedies. At the other extreme, Ángela Belli counters that *Numancia*'s final scene represents a felicitous ending since it hands Cipión a moral defeat that outweighs his military triumph (127, 128). Paul Lewis-Smith squares the generic circle. He concurs with Tar that both the Numantines and Cipión commit fatal errors and receive just punishments: the stubborn Numantines destroy themselves and the equally stubborn Romans lose their honor. Yet he traces the roots of this "double issue" plot to the genre of tragicomedy rather than classical tragedy. Lewis-Smith concludes that Cervantes's drama is "chiefly conceived as a suspenseful miniature tragicomedy which gives an exquisitely happy conclusion to the drama as a whole." More significantly, he finds that Cervantes's play was "clearly first and last an attempt at delighting an audience" (21, 22).

Lewis-Smith attributes *Numancia*'s "extraordinary capacity to grip and move" to four features. First, he notes the noble qualities of the play's hero, Numancia. Second, Cipión's cruelty charges the plot with dramatic tension. Third, the play is rooted in historical events. Finally, Lewis-Smith argues that novelty, that is, the Spanish public's apparent lack of prior knowledge regarding the Celtiberian resistance, further enhances its theatrical appeal (22). Leaving aside the question of whether Cervantes's contemporaries did or did not know the history of the Celtiberian uprising, I agree with Lewis-Smith that "[t]he drama's first purpose is to please" and that the play exploits parallels to the reality of contemporary Spain (25).⁴ Going one step farther, I would underscore a fifth pleasure woven into the text of *Numancia*: the play's relentless focus on the practice of military conquest by siege.

Before pursuing the assumption that *La destrucción de la Numancia* imparted delight to its audiences or readers, it would be useful to review evidence of its actual reception. Cervantes affirms in the prologue to his *Ocho comedias y ocho entremeses nunca representadas* (1615) that *Numancia* did reach the stage: "se vieron en los teatros de Madrid representar *Los tratos de Argel*, que yo compuse, *La destrucción de Numancia* y *La batalla naval*" (*Ocho comedias* 25). He also claims that his early plays were well received: "[t]odas ellas se recitaron sin que se les ofreciese ofrenda de pepinos ni de otra

cosa arrojadiza: corrieron su carrera sin silbos, gritas ni barahúndas” (*Ocho comedias* 25–26). Regrettably, few records of public response to the play exist to date. What does emerge clearly, however, is that Cervantes selected the Roman siege of Numancia as the subject matter for one of his early plays. It is reasonable to assume that, like any aspiring dramaturge, Cervantes wished to please his audience, and that he found in this historical siege plot a relevant and suggestive subject matter. Furthermore, having just returned from captivity in Algiers, Cervantes could write with firsthand authority about the latest military tactics.⁵

The Changing Face of Early Modern Warfare

Spanish bellicose engagements during Cervantes’s lifetime reached literally epic proportions, engulfing financial resources, manpower, and the attention of the playwright’s contemporaries. Measured in military terms, Philip II (r. 1556–98) was the most powerful ruler in Europe, having converted his father Charles V’s vast inheritance into “el poder hegemónico de la cristiandad a partir de la segunda mitad del siglo XVI” (Fernández Albaladejo 1). Philip II led Spain through the final phases of the Italian Wars, which gave Spain control of the Franche-Comté in France and of large swaths of the Italian peninsula by 1559. He waged war against the Dutch beginning in 1568 and acquired Portugal through naval domination in 1580, but fared less favorably by sea against England when the Spanish Armada failed in its attempt to overpower that island kingdom in 1588. On the Mediterranean, Philip’s ships continuously fought off Suleiman the Magnificent’s Ottoman Turks.

Spain’s heightened military involvements elicited many responses, from protest to anxiety to an uninhibited taste for representations of what William Butler Yeats would later term war’s “terrible beauty” (Yeats, “Easter 1916” 182–84). The Holy League’s victory over the Turks at the Battle of Lepanto in 1571 elicited an unprecedented outpouring of print, visual reportage, and musical compositions “united in a collective response that in quantitative terms is without parallel in sixteenth-century literature” (Fenlon 263). The critical bibliography on war in Cervantes’s œuvre in general and *Numancia* in particular attests to the Spanish public’s enthusiastic consumption of “gunpowder poetics” (Martínez 67).⁶ But *Numancia* is not merely a martial play; it revels in the novel materiality of a particular military tactic, that of siegecraft, to fabricate a beguiling and highly topical spectacle.

The introduction of gunpowder in Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries led to dramatic shifts in the face of warfare. Gunpowder made possible the production of powerful cannons capable of breaching tall, thin medieval fortress walls. The foundries of Málaga, Milán, and Innsbruck manufactured Charles V’s munitions, to which Philip II added the Royal Artillery Factory in Seville. As offensive weaponry outstripped the resistance of defensive fortifications, Italian architects “created a defensive system tailored to neutralize the besieger’s newfound advantage” (Ostwald 1). That neutralizing system was called a star fort or *traza italiana* (see fig. 1). It featured shorter battlements for less visibility from a distance, thicker walls the better to withstand cannon fire, and sloping battlements that repelled incoming projectiles at a glancing angle rather than head-on (see fig. 2).

Triangular bastions were added, providing cross-coverage at all points on the perimeter (Ostwald 5).

George Rothrock numbers among the first twentieth-century historians to observe that “early modern field battles were rarely fought and the preponderance of military effort was absorbed in the attack and defense of fortified places or in maneuvers to pose the threat of such an attack” (v). In 1988, Geoffrey Parker argued that when “constructed as part of an integrated system, fortifications *alla moderna* dominated the conduct of [early modern] warfare” (348–49). This historical swing away from open-field skirmishes to positional standoffs beginning in the sixteenth century subjected garrisoned populations to a brutal new possibility: the prospect of protracted and debilitating siege.

Siege as Spectacle

The implications of the shift from offensive to defensive warfare was to exert a powerful force on the early modern European imaginary. Positional warfare, as Jacques Lafaye notes, demanded adjustments and response at every level of society:

La artillería fue una innovación técnica, de efectos múltiples y sucesivas etapas, que llegó a afectar la economía, la estructura del Estado y la sociedad, la monarquía en su relación con la nobleza y el “brazo popular” (los plebeyos o pecheros), la política internacional y al fin y al cabo la ética y la visión del hombre. (14)

Spanish writers of the 1580s registered awareness of the military revolution underway with a barrage of siege-themed *romances*. Whether framed in the past or the present, their martial narratives captivated readers and listeners with the drama and the trauma of defensive warfare. Juan de la Cueva dedicated ten historical ballads to various military blockades in his *Phoebus's Chorus* (Seville 1587), while the following year Lucas Rodríguez devoted seven narrative poems to Troy and eleven to the fall of Zamora.

The step from siege ballads to siege plays was not only small, but, in Baras Escolá's estimation, “inevitable” (20). For Cory Reed, theater was the ideal medium for exploring public response to new forms of violence: “The interactive nature of performance allows people to come together in a shared space to contemplate ideas considered meaningful by the playwright and the audience” (73). Among the many siege plays of the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Cervantes's *Numancia*, Lope's *El asalto de Mástrique por el Príncipe de Parma* (circa 1600), and Calderón de la Barca's *El sitio de Breda* (composed shortly after Spain's short-lived victory over the Dutch in 1625) number among the most widely known today.⁷

Within this context, *Numancia* has been seen to dramatize the agonistic ethical challenges posed by siegecraft. For Michael Armstrong-Roche, the play enacts “tension between an appeal to the eternal verities of the cardinal virtues and the lie of an unjust war of conquest” (199), while for Luis Avilés, Cervantes's siege plot calls into question the “proper and improper ways of waging war” (256). Verónica Ryjik traces the gendered dialectic of martial action / inaction that the blockade imposed on Numantines and Romans alike. At a more material level, however, siege plays seize upon the visual culture

of violence to attract the attention of a curious public.⁸ Renaissance military engineering made war both more lethal and more aesthetically arresting. Books of mechanical design called *theatrum mechanorum*, or theater of machines, testified to a new “aesthetic of instrumentality” (Reed 62–69). As historian Brian Sandberg notes, siege warfare

... promoted the production of exciting narratives and stunning images. A new visual culture of violence emerged during the religious wars, creating elaborate visualizations of sieges as enticing and pleasurable pageants. This new field of perception made it possible for siege spectacles to be variously presented as religious dramas, confessional testimonies, and delights to curious audiences across Europe. (145)

The Spanish assault on Antwerp of 1584–85, led by Alessandro Farnese, involved the construction of concentric artillery forts and a massive pontoon bridge. Both sides devised amphibious explosives and siege engines. These were “sketched, engraved, and described, and then disseminated to an entranced reading public” (Sandberg 153–54).⁹

The aesthetic impact of military *techné* extended beyond the realm of reportage. Siege scenes gave artists the opportunity to experiment with aerial perspective. For example, an anonymous engraving of the siege of Bouchain, Flanders, foregrounds a group of encamped soldiers overlooking the battle unfolding below. In addition, the ornamental cartouche that frames this battle scene incorporates the image of a star fort as a decorative motif (see fig. 3). Sieges were even attended as if they were theatrical performances. At the 1628 assault by Catholic troops on the southern French town of Le Pouzin, the ladies of Valence took their places on the banks of the Rhône in order, in the words of a contemporary observer, “to have the pleasure of this siege” (Sandberg 143).

It has been suggested that the slow-moving theatricality of positional warfare appealed to early modern audiences as a form of visual entertainment akin to courtly ballet (Sandberg 147). Indeed, in the “Bodas de Camacho” episode of *Don Quijote*, wealthy groom-to-be Camacho commissions an allegorical ballet or *danza hablada* to entertain the guests at his wedding. The dance represents the assault on a maiden trapped in a tower by two suitors, *Interés* and *Cupido*. Cupid’s arrows prove ineffectual in breaching the castle walls, but Profit slams down the flimsy battlements with the toss of a heavy purse and drags the maiden away in chains (2.20, 702–04).¹⁰

In the case of *Numancia*, however, I would argue that the reverse was true. Rather than view his firsthand experiences of war and captivity from 1575–80 through the lens of courtly dance, Cervantes discerned that certain facets of early modern positional combat lent themselves to staging as dramatic tropes. This proposition is made more plausible by his text’s resistance to zero-sum nominations of winners and losers.

Siege Tropes in *Numancia*

The exhumed corpse of act 2 predicted that the Roman conquest of Numancia would drag both contestants down to an inglorious draw:

No llevarán romanos la victoria
de la fuerte Numancia, ni ella menos
tendrá de el enemigo triunfo o gloria,
amigos y enemigos siendo buenos. (1073–76)

To a certain extent, Muerto's prophesy also applies to *Numancia* criticism today. Lacking clear heroes or villains and laced with moral uncertainty, *Numancia* continues to leave its readers "lejos de llegar a algún tipo de consenso en lo que respecta al mensaje político de la obra" (Ryjik 206). These critical challenges suggest that the *telos* of Cervantes's play lies neither with Rome nor Numancia, but rather with the circumstance that bound both camps together in time and space, that is, the circumstance of the *cercos* itself. Cervantes stages a virtual *theatrum mechanorum* of fortress warfare in *Numancia* that grants center stage to its imposing battlements, entrenchments, earthworks, and towers. In addition, hunger escalating to starvation within the encircled citadel intensifies the drumbeat of desperation leading to *Numancia*'s fiery climax and dramatic denouement.

References to siegecraft accumulate throughout *Numancia* to create a suffocating poetics of entrapment. In act 1, General Cipión instructs his men to dig a trench to choke off the Numantines' supply lines. To put a heroic face to this wearisome chore, he assigns all troops, cavalry officers, and foot soldiers alike, to shovel duty. To further elevate this novel form of bloodless warfare in the legion's eyes, he announces that he himself will join the diggers at their task:

Ejercítense agora vuestras manos
en romper y a cavar la dura tierra,
y cubrirse de polvo los amigos
que no lo están de sangre de enemigos.
No quede de este oficio reservado
ninguno que le tenga preeminente.
Trabaje el decurión como el soldado,
y no se muestre en esto diferente.
Yo mismo tomaré el hierro pesado
y romperé la tierra fácilmente.
Hacen todos cual yo; veréis que hago
tal obra, con que a todos satisfago. (325–36)

The verbs *romper* and *cavar* and the nouns *tierra* and *polvo* that Cipión repeats underscore his charge: the Roman army is to substitute one heavy iron implement, the sword, for another, the spade (*el hierro pesado*). Onstage, the presence and physical wielding of these imposing props would drive home the contrast between skirmish warfare and positional entrenchment.

Visual, verbal, direct, and indirect references to the "foso trinchéado" (3.1196) that encircles the Numantines, as well as the "fuerte muro" (3.1252) that holds the Romans at bay resound throughout the play. For example, the allegorical figure of España cries:

Así están encogidos y encerrados
los tristes numantinos en sus muros
ni ellos pueden salir ni ser entrados
y están de los asaltos bien seguros. (409–12)

The purposefully redundant *encogidos* and *encerrados* of verse 409 draw attention to the besieged Celtiberians' shrunk and constrained circumstance. These words find their echo in the preposition *en* of the following verse and the redundant *ni ... salir ni ser entrados* of the next, rising in claustrophobic crescendo.

The very security of the Numantines' defensive battlements ensnares the rebels and prevents them from challenging their foes in open combat, as España laments:

Pero, en solo mirar que están privados
de ejercitar sus fuertes brazos duros
la guerra piden, o la muerte a voces
con horrendos acentos y feroces. (413–16)

In line 416, España intones an internally rhymed *o* that accentuates the horror that she experiences and that her double, the reader or spectator bearing witness to the Numantines' confinement, must feel as well.

Visual cues reinforce the poetics of entrapment. España appears onstage “coronada con unas torres y trae un castillo en la mano” (352 [stage direction]). Her putative gender role, that of passive female, mirrors the plight of an inexpugnable fortress. The towers and ramparts of her Celtiberian *castro*, in turn, magnify and reflect the predicament faced by besieged *trazas italianas* of Cervantes's day. España frets that the enemy may erect earthworks on the banks of the Duero and thereby storm her people from above, as Suleiman's navy had done to recapture the Tunisian fortress of La Goleta in 1574:

Y pues sola la parte por do corre
y toca la ciudad el ancho Duero,
es aquella que ayuda y que socorre en algo
al numantino prisionero,
antes que alguna máquina o gran torre
en sus aguas se funde,
rogar quiero al caudaloso y conocido río
en lo que puede ayudar al pueblo mío. (417–24)

At España's behest, Duero, accompanied by the three other rivers that converge in Soria, appears onstage. Duero's arrival highlights the significant role that geography, most notably rivers, has played throughout history in the construction of defensive fortifications. His entrance sets in motion a metatheatrical dialogue between these male and female characters. Duero too despairs of the “torres y trincheras” that the Romans are erecting around Numancia (456). He urges España to resign herself to defeat, comforted by the prospect of posthumous revenge. Duero then foresees that the Goths will overcome Rome (472–80). In time, Philip II will restore Spain to her former glory:

¡Qué envidia, qué temor España amada
te tendrán mil naciones extranjeras
en quien tú teñirás tu espada
y tenderás triunfando tus banderas! (521–24)

Duero addresses his female counterpart with a term of endearment (*amada*), but the promise of a tender pas-de-deux between the two swerves

abruptly to the image of España staining her sword with the blood of a thousand foreign nations. This startling reversal of traditional gender roles intensifies the dramatic impact of their exchange.¹¹

Numancia's high walls merit a speaking part in act 3, thanks to Mujer 3, who implores them (if only they could) to arouse her countrymen to arms:

¡Oh muros de esta ciudad!
Si podéis hablar, decid
y mil veces repetid,
“¡Numantinos, libertad
los templos, las casas vuestras,
levantadas en concordia!” (1354–59)

Whether the façade of the *vestuario* serves as Numancia's high walls or the actor reciting these verses merely gestures upward, this invocation invites the Sorian fortress onstage and into the theatergoers' consciousness as an active dramatic element.

Much like the onlookers foregrounded on contemporary siege canvases, Cervantes's allegorical characters grant spectators an omniscient view of action on both sides of the trench. Francisco Ruiz Ramón contrasts the symbolic figures of *Numancia* with those of Juan de la Cueva (1543–1612). De la Cueva's characters occupy the same level as the “real” characters. As such, they can intervene to change the course of dramatic events. Cervantes's allegorical figures, to the contrary, “se mantienen por encima del mundo ‘histórico’... como fuerzas superiores y transcendentales. En la estructura de *Numancia*, es fundamental esa superposición de niveles dramáticos” (131). In other words, España, Duero, Fama, and Hambre serve as metatheatrical elements that both focalize and distance dramatic action. They usher the above-mentioned references to trenches, towers, enclosure, rivers, and ramparts to the very threshold of Cervantes's spectators' lives, yet from a privileged aerial perspective where they can be enjoyed as art.

By invoking the geography and infrastructure of siege warfare, Cervantes achieved more than simply transforming the *techné* of positional combat into pleasurable pageantry; he also engineered an experience within the temporal frame of four acts. The result is a reproduction in compressed time and space of the lethal effects of food shortage on a besieged populace. Hunger in *Numancia* thus serves the dual purpose of dramatizing suffering within the encircled citadel—and telling time. Scarcity was an all-too-familiar specter in sixteenth-century Spain, enshrined in Lenten observances, imposed upon everyday life by the collapse of Spain's rural economy, and experienced firsthand by the urban poor, voyagers, and soldiers. For example, famine ravaged the northern European theaters of war in 1556, where Philip II sought to raise an army:

Throughout the unspeakably hot summer of 1556 Philip went about the arduous business of raising an army of 50,000. All over northern Europe that year the grain crops failed, and presently death, as if too impatient to wait for the French and Spanish to begin slaying one another, commenced operations himself under the hideous mask of famine. (Walsh 191)

Sieges too operated under the “hideous (in this case man-made) mask of famine” by blocking supply lines and provoking scarcity. Debilitated

populations were both easier to conquer and more highly motivated to surrender. The siege of La Rochelle in 1627 provides a well-documented example of this brutal logic. A Franco-Spanish alliance led by Louis XIII surrounded the Huguenot stronghold with a twelve-kilometer entrenchment fortified by eleven forts and eighteen redoubts. Sea jetties blocked British naval aid. Within fourteen months, famine, disease, desertion, and casualties had reduced a population of some 45,000 by between 8,000 and 10,000. Historian Christopher Duffy writes, “Negotiations for a capitulation opened on 27 October 1628, after the Huguenots had eaten the last of the grass, shoes, and sword scabbards” (119). But La Rochelle was not unique. Urban centers across Europe, the New World, and the Mediterranean suffered similar terrors throughout the period.

In act 4 of *Numancia*, the allegorical figure of Guerra summons Hambre onstage, accompanied by Enfermedad, to carry out her severe decree:

Hambre y Enfermedad, ejecutoras
de mis terribles mandos y severos,
de vida y salud consumidoras
con quien no vale ruego, mando o fueros,
pues ya mi intención sois sabidoras,
no hay para qué de nuevo encareceros
de cuánto gusto me será y contento,
que luego, luego hagáis mi mandamiento. (1976–83)

In place of the golden garments normally worn by Death, Hunger appears “con un desnudillo de muerte, y encima una ropa de bocací amarillo, y una máscara descolorida” (1975 [stage direction]), while Enfermedad too arrives with her face hidden behind a yellow mask (1975 [stage direction]). Renaissance iconography associated yellow with imperfection. This subtle chromatic downshift implies that Hunger and Disease have arrived to carry out their master Death’s foul labor.¹²

Furthermore, once Cervantes had abandoned the classical precept of temporal unity, intensifying references to hunger in *Numancia* solved the problem of marking the slow and inexorable passage of siege time. Thus, before the trench is dug, hunger is barely an issue. In act 1, the Numantines murmur against Roman tyranny, the allegorical figure of España echoes their lament, and the Río Duero prophesies that the Numantines’ short-term losses will be avenged under Philip II’s reign. By act 2, the trench had been dug and hunger had set in. Some Numantines defect; Marandro blames the siege for the lack of supplies and for delaying his marriage to Lira. Marquino exhumes the corpse of an early victim of “la flaca hambre” (946) to help him communicate with the spirits. The ticking clock of hunger gives way to starvation in act 3, indicating the passing of yet more grueling siege-time. Marandro vows to seek bread in the Roman camp, a sublimating sacrifice to prove his love to Lira. The Numantines choose to immolate themselves rather than surrender. But first, in a deed whose ghastliness is matched only by the people’s ravenous need for nourishment, they will draw and quarter their Roman prisoners and roast their flesh to stay their hunger for an hour. In calm, measured tones, Teógenes instructs his countrymen:

Y para entretener por algún hora
 el hambre que ya roe nuestros güesos
 haréis descuartizar luego a la hora
 esos tristes romanos que están presos,
 y sin del chico al grande hacer mejora,
 repártanse entre todos, que con esos
 será nuestra comida celebrada
 por estraña, crüel necesitada. (1433–41)

Anthropophagy here serves not to denigrate the pre-Christian Numantines for a barbaric act, but rather to magnify the implacable calculus of the *cercos*. Like other forms of torture, siege pushes its victims beyond the limits of civilized conduct.¹³

A mother asks her vainly nursing infant, “¿Qué mamas, triste criatura?” (1708). A boy implores, “¡Madre mía, que me fino” (1724). In act 4, Marandro returns fatally wounded from his expedition, but Lira refuses to nourish herself with the bread that caused his death. The allegorical figures of Guerra, Enfermedad, and Hambre step forward to describe the apocalyptic death throes of Numancia, now engulfed in flames.¹⁴ The figure of Fama closes the play, consoling the Romans for their cowardly victory and promising eternal fame to the proud Numantine martyrs.

Miguel Martínez has recently thrown light on the subgenre of “gunpowder epics” that circulated in Spain and the New World during the latter half of the sixteenth century. Gunpowder epics were martial poems composed in octaves arranged in cantos. Rather than idealize the heroism and glory of war, however, gunpowder epics brought home the “fire and flame” of modern warfare” as witnessed by the soldiers themselves (75). In like manner, Cervantes’s *Numancia* fixes an unremitting gaze upon the “guerra de curso tan extraño y larga” (5). As Ruíz Ramón observes, “Cervantes hace desfilar ante nosotros todos los horrores de la guerra, individualizados en el vivir cotidiano de unos personajes” (138). But *Numancia*’s interrogation of positional warfare not only horrifies. Through the eyes of its allegorical witnesses, *La destrucción de la Numancia* also stages “the pleasure of this siege” for audiences and readers who would never witness Spain’s military engagements firsthand. Yes, *Numancia* permitted the audience to admire the lethal implements of siegecraft: its fortifications and punishing duration, as measured on the relentless clock of starvation and despair. But it also granted curious readers access to the “terrible beauty” of foreign wars from the secure redoubt of the printed page.

NOTES

1. For two discussions of possible dates of composition of *La Numancia*, see Canavaggio, *Cervantès Dramaturge* (21), and Hermenegildo, *La "Numancia"* (9–12).
2. Citations correspond to Alfredo Hermenegildo's *La destrucción de Numancia* and include the act number plus the line number (consecutive in this edition). Hermenegildo was selected because his edition disambiguates the role of "Otra" by assigning her voice to three distinct characters: Mujer 1, Mujer 2, and Mujer 3. Hermenegildo renders General Scipio's name as Cipión, in accordance with Schevill y Bonilla's 1920 edition.
3. Avalue-Arce questions hyper-patriotic interpretation of Cervantes's play (71). Zimic, Simerka, King, Graf (*Valladolid*), Kahn, and Johnson detect ambivalence toward or criticism of Spain's imperial aspirations and policies. Marrast interprets the Numantine defeat in Cervantes's play in terms of Spain's future success under the banner of Catholicism: "España triunfará cuando la causa que defiende sea la de Dios, cuando sus soldados combatan por una causa santa" (28). Ángela Belli finds that a "spirit of nationalism" pervades the work (128). Francisco Vivar notes that the besieged Numantines high in their fortress occupy a space closer to heaven while the besieging Romans below linger closer to hell. This suggests to Vivar a moral battle between Christ and anti-Christ (11). King identifies two recent historical accounts that Cervantes appears to have adapted for his play: Ambrosio de Morales's *Coronica general de España* (1574) and Antonio de Guevara's *Epístolas familiares* (1539) (202–05). Kahn cites a number of classical accounts of the Celtiberian war, including Sallust, Florus, Appian, and Plutarch, that had been translated into Spanish by the sixteenth century (577 n7). De Armas adduces as possible additional sources Cicero, Macrobius, and Vives (*Cervantes* 179). Baras Escolá discerns the influences of Garibay's *Compendio* (1571) and Herrera's *Anotaciones* (1580). He concedes that contemporary historical romances may also have inspired Cervantes (20). Francisco J. Martín argues that the Numantines acted with a "virtud heroica" that provoked the Romans to bring infamy upon themselves.
4. The novelty of Cervantes's historical plot is indeed debatable. Rachel Schmidt asserts that the Numantines' self-destruction under siege had attained the solidity of a literary *topos* by the sixteenth century (27). Friedman considers the siege of Numancia a "historical event of common knowledge" that granted Cervantes a degree of artistic freedom (80). Also inclining to this interpretation are both Simerka and Morey, each of whom implies that the subject matter was widely known by contrasting Cervantes's dramatization of the Roman siege to various epic treatments of that motif.
5. The play appears to have been written after Cervantes returned from captivity around 1580. Hermenegildo speculates that the bloody wars of the Alpujarras (1570–80) provided the impetus for its composition (*La Numancia de Cervantes* 51). However, Cervantes spent much of that period outside of Spain, witnessing or hearing about other sieges such as the Ottoman recapture of the Tunisian fortress of La Goleta, in 1574. In the Part I of *Don Quijote*, known as the Captive's Tale, Captain Ruy Pérez recounts with the precision of a military engineer the defeat of the besieged Spaniards who defended the fortress (1.39, 1.40 404–08). Like *La destrucción de la Numancia*, the siege narrative nested within the Captive's Tale favors both contestants and neither. From Ruy Pérez's perspective, the loss of La Goleta was a relief, yet the twin sonnets that cap his narrative lament the "mortal, triste caída" of the fortress (407–08). For more on Cervantes's

- Mediterranean sojourn, see also Canavaggio (*Cervantes* 48–70) as well as Lucía Megías's recent study of Cervantes's youth, *La juventud de Miguel de Cervantes* (189–270).
6. Other sources of interest on this issue include Endress, Rupp, Torrico, and Avilés, who each examine military discourse in *La Numancia*. On echoes of these problems throughout the Cervantine corpus, see, for example, Barbara Fuchs, who construes the *Quijote* as a critique of war.
 7. Frank Casas surmises that Calderón wrote the manuscript some time prior to the first known edition of 1628 (296).
 8. Military praxis and the hardware of war continues to lure audiences. As of July 2017, Nash Information Services LLC reported the *Star War* movie franchise's earnings at over seven billion dollars.
 9. Alicia Cámara surveys military art produced by Cervantes's contemporaries (*Castillos, Los ingenieros*).
 10. Six chapters later, Cervantes applies an equally light touch to the siege motif in the Maese Pedro episode, which represents Charlemagne's abortive siege of Zaragoza in 778 (2.26 750–59). Of course, the Discourse on Arms and Letters in the Part I delivers a more solemn denunciation of the *techné* of siegecraft. Here Don Quijote blesses the era before the invention of “aquestos endemoniados instrumentos de la artillería” which allow cowards to vanquish brave knights at a distance with a “desmandada bala disparada de quien quizá huyó.” The Knight further curses “la maldita máquina” of matchlock firearms, and rues living in an “edad tan detestable como es esta en que ahora vivimos,” an age of gunpowder which threatens to cut him down in battle with no chance to win glory in a fair fight (1.38 394–98). Notice that Don Quijote does not condemn firearms *per se*, but rather the challenge they pose for exercising military valor as he knows it, an animating concern of both Romans and Numantines in *La destrucción de la Numancia*.
 11. For more on the gendered discourse of empire in *Numancia*, see Ryjik.
 12. Of *amarillo*, Covarrubias writes, “Entre los colores se tiene por el más infelice por ser el de la muerte ...” For a more detailed analysis of the semiotics of Hambre and Enfermedad's appearance in this scene, see Cantalapiedra Erostarbe (246–48) and Peña (75).
 13. Graf identifies a Eucharistic allegory in the play's movement from human sacrifice to Marandro's blood-and-bread sacrifice to Bariato's ultimate self-sacrifice. This progression places the Roman general Scipio, whom Graf identifies with Philip II, in an untenable position with respect to Christianity, an irony Graf suspects that Cervantes's readers would have clearly understood (“Politics”).
 14. For more on Cervantes's allusive use of the New Testament Book of the Apocalypse, see Bryan Stiegler for whom Cervantes's staging of *Numancia*'s destruction follows the biblical narrative of an End of Days that must precede salvation. From the ashes of the Celtiberian defeat rise Catholic Spain's evangelical triumphs under Philip II.

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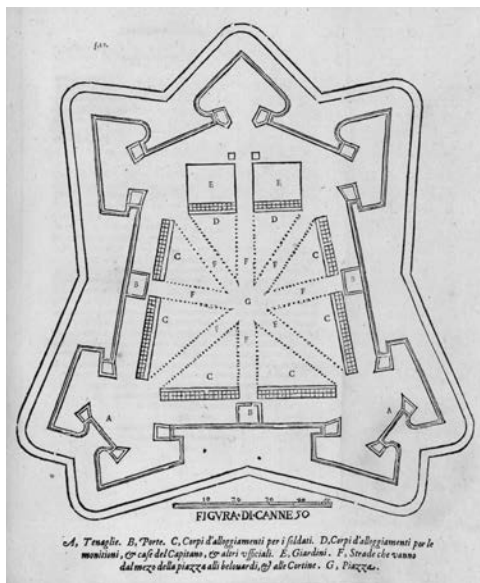


FIG. 1. "Traza italiana," from *Della architettura militare* by Gabrielle Busca (Milan, Girolamo Bordone and Pietro Martire Locarni, 1601, 140, figura 10). Reproduced by permission from the Biblioteca Histórica de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid, call number BH FLL 22018.

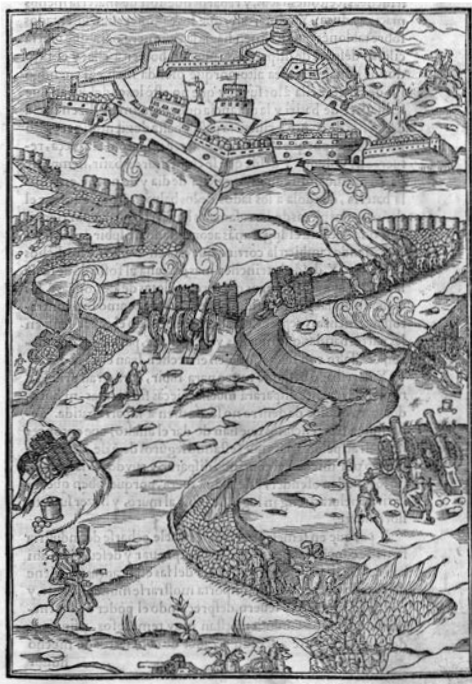


FIG. 2. Sloping battlements, depicted in "Cómo ofenderá el capitán [a] los cercados." From Book 2 of *El perfecto capitán, instruido en la disciplina militar* by Diego de Álava y Viamont (Madrid, Pedro Madrigal, 1590, fol. 88r). Reproduced by permission from the Biblioteca Histórica de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid, call number BH FG 303.

