La Numancia
and the Structure of Cervantine Ambiguity

Carroll B. Johnson

University of California

This paper is the result of repeated attempts in several courses and seminars to resolve Cervantes' position, or the position adopted by Cervantes' works, with respect to the dominant ideology of his society. The work here considered offers a privileged terrain on which to treat this question, to advance hypotheses and test them, for its theme is precisely the characteristics and value of the mighty Spanish empire of which Cervantes was a minor member. It is in fact part of the rhetorical support system of the dominant ideology: a propaganda piece. And yet the text is ambiguous. The propaganda piece may be read with equal justification as an attack on the official value system. The paper examines the play within its relevant socio-ideological context and attempts to show how this ambiguity is embedded in the text by the web of associations, literary and political, ancient and contemporary, to which the reader is referred by it. The paper demonstrates, finally, the impermeability of Cervantes' text at least to me as a social historian of literature in search of the writer's underlying ideological bias. I present it in this journal in the hope that scholars more ideologically aware than I may find it useful as a point of departure for further consideration.

In 133 BC a Roman army under the command of Scipio Africanus ended the siege of the Celt-Iberian city of Numantia following the death of most or all of the inhabitants. The most enduring Roman version of the events is that of Lucius Anneus Florus in his Epitome de Tito Livio, a work of the second century.
AD. Florus' version has survived primarily because it recounts what is in essence a collective suicide. The Numantians, upon realizing that their situation was hopeless, destroyed their possessions and then themselves, depriving Rome of her triumph. The Roman historian praises what he considers an act of heroism: "Praise be to this city, most strong and in my judgment most blessed in its very hour of destruction!" Finally crushed by a new commander-in-chief, the city left nothing of itself for the enemy to enjoy. Not one Numantan man was left to be taken prisoner; no spoils of war remained, even of the poorest sort. They burned even their weapons. Our triumph was in name only." A legend is born.

In 1581 or thereabouts, at the height of Spanish hegemony in Europe, Miguel de Cervantes wrote a play based on the events of 133 BC entitled El cerco... or La destrucción de Numancia. It is a tragedy in four acts which culminates in the astounding collective suicide and its effect upon the Romans. Throughout, the Numantians are referred to as españoles, and there is a clear statement that the present tragedy will be more than compensated in the sixteenth century by the power and glory of the Spanish empire.

Cervantes probably did not base himself on L. A. Florus directly, but rather on the Crónica general de España commissioned by Felipe II. begun by Florián de Ocampo and continued by Ambrosio de Morales. It is possible that he was also influenced by one of the Epístolas familiares of Fray Antonio de Guevara (1553) which offers a version of the story, including the dramatic suicide. Morales' version follows Florus closely, except that he consistently refers to the Numantians as españoles, which suggests that, even before Cervantes there existed a tradition of considering the destruction of a Celtiberian city in 133 BC as an episode of Spanish national history.

Historians of Spanish literature have in the main been content to continue this version of the Numantia story in general and Cervantes' dramatization of it in particular. There has grown up a kind of conventional wisdom in this regard, according to which Cervantes is a superpatriot who sees in the destruction of Numantia the beginning of Spanish imperial glory. Two quotations, one Spanish and one not, exemplify this point of view. Francisco Ynduráin avers: "Aun cuando se trate de tema venento, lo que Cervantes ha ido a buscar es un momento glorioso de nuestra historia, glorioso a pesar de lo adverso y por la entereza y valores morales de aquellos antepasados. Creo que no hay en el resto de su obra un momento de tal plenitud en la exaltación del heroísmo nacional, sin nada que lo menoscabe. Aquí no hay lugar para la ironía ni para la reticencia, pues el ideal heroico vale y atravía." Outside the peninsula, Marie Laffranque has observed: "Pourt de la gloire présente de son pays, Cervantes voit dans la"nation victorieuse comme un premier avatar de la future grandeur espagnole. Morallement, Numance a été la plus forte. Elle doit donc remettre de ses cendres, et le miracle du sacrifice et de la fidélité peut se perpetrer, se reproduire à chaque instant. Numance va obtenir le triomphe de Rome pour, plus tard, lui succéder." Within the play, the river Dacaro prophesies:

Estas injurias vengará la mano del fiero Atlio en tiempos venideros,
poniendo al pueblo tan fecio romano
sujeto a obedecer todos sus fuertos,
y portillos abriendo en Vaticano
sus bravos hijos y otros extranjeros,
harán que para traer vuelva la planta
el gran piloto de la nave santa.
Y también vendrá tiempo en que se merece
estar blandiendo el español cuchillo
sobre el cuello romano, y que requiera
sólo por la bondad de su caudillo.

These ringing verses admirably exemplify the "imperial glory" theory proposed by Laffranque and Ynduráin, and yet something is not right. The facts of Cervantes' life, and his other writings, suggest that he simply could not have held these patriotic ideas. In 1580 Cervantes returned to Spain after five years' captivity in Algiers, only to discover that his splendid war record, his heroism at Lepanto, his repeated attempts to escape his Muslim captors — in a word, his outstanding service to Christianity and King — was worth nothing to him in terms of his position in society. He ran after Felipe II to Portugal and was rewarded with an insignificant commission to North Africa. In 1582 he published veiled attacks against the monarch in La Galatea. His activities as requisitioner of provisions for the Armada landed him in jail. In 1590 he applied for four different administrative posts in America and received the famous "busque por acá que se le haiga alguna merced" for an answer. A recent critic has suggested, only half in jest, that had Cervantes asked for a position in Spain he would have been told to look for something in America. Cervantes commemorated the death of Felipe II in 1598 with two well-known compositions. The first is the sonnet to the royal monument in Sevilla which begins: "Yo a Dios que me
espana esté grandeza" and ends with the chilling "fue, y no
hubo nada." The other paraphrases some verses from the Sermon
on the Mount and applies the concept of laying up treasures in Heaven ironically to the departed sovereign.

Within the play itself there is another prophecy which, by virtue of its associations, is susceptible to an ironic reading. The speaker is Guerra, an allegorical figure.

Sé bien que en todo el orbe de la tierra
sé llevada del valor hispano,
la dulce ocasión que estoy reinando
un carlos, un filipo, y un fernando.

(vv. 1996-1999)

The last verse immediately recalls the famous “Soneto al imperio” of Hernando de Acuña, which begins: “Ya se acerca, señores, ya es llegada la edad gloriosa en que promete el cielo” and whose second quattain ends: “un monarca, un imperio, y una espeda.” The straightforward patriotism of this tripartite verse was parodied by Cervantes on another occasion. Anthony van Beysterveldt has called attention to the sonnet to Pyramus and Thisbe composed by Don Lorenzo de Miranda, the poet son of the “Caballero del Verde Gabán” who hosts Don Quijote and Sancho in Don Quijote, II. 18. The verses in question read:

ved qué historia
que a entrambos en un punto no extraño caso!
los mata, los encubre y resucita
una espeda, un sepulcro, una memoria.

This reminiscence, in its unlikely context, has the effect of mocking the original. It is not difficult to project this association onto the verse from La Numancia and see there an even more grandiose attack on the idea of imperial grandeur. We should recall that not civilization, but war is the commodity to be broadcast throughout the world by “un carlos, un filipo, y un fernando.”

I have attempted to demonstrate that there is evidence, both internal and external, to support two diametrically opposed theories of interpretation. La Numancia can be either a glorification of the Spanish empire and its virtues, or an attack upon them. If we now turn to the play’s relation to its audience at various points in time we can observe the same frustrating ambiguity. José Emilio Pacheco, in his recent adaptation of our play, favors the revolutionary thesis and remarks, inexactly, that never, in the four hundred years since its writing, has La Numancia been staged in the service of the totalitarian, imperialistic interests it apparently seeks to glorify. Rather, he continues, it has been invariably staged, at least since the beginning of the nineteenth century, as a statement in favor of liberty, of the struggle against invasions and tyrannies. He mentions in particular the productions at Zaragoza during the French invasion of 1808, at Madrid during the Nationalist siege of 1837, and at Paris in 1965 in protest against the war in Viet Nam. Francisco Yndurain, however, calls attention to another performance. After remarking the “free, even forced adaptation by Rafael Alberti” (Madrid, 1937), he passes to “another version, that of Nicólas González Ruiz, presented at Alcalá de Henares, in front of the church where Cervantes was baptised (1956).” The ambivalence could not be more perfect. The work which inspires the defenders of Madrid in 1937 also serves to celebrate the orthodoxy of their vanquishers in 1956.

These disparate interpretations are not, I believe, a priori from one’s concept of Spanish life in general and of one’s ideal Cervantes in particular. Spanish life can be viewed either as monolithic or conflictive, and Cervantes can be either a superpatriot, a kind of right-wing defender of the status quo, or, a free thinker whose intellectual guru is Erasmo and who delights in slyly mocking the existing order. I believe that if a work such as La Numancia can consistently generate such contradictory interpretations, it must simply be ambiguous. Rather than engage in a sterile debate to determine which reading is “correct,” it seems more pertinent to study the phenomenon of ambiguity itself. This is what I propose to do in the remainder of this paper, and I shall be concerned with the questions of how (quo modo) the work is ambiguous, and what determines its ambiguity. I should like to discuss the work within its relevant historical context and examine the web of ideas and associations (those of ca. 1580, not 1980) cast below the surface of the action. It is these associations, I hope to show, that determine the polivalence of the surface.

Let us begin with the most elegant and prestigious, the relation between La Numancia and the Aeneid. Vergil’s poem provides a mythical-heroic underpinning for the glories of Augustus’ empire by locating its origins in the disastrous defeat of Troy. Similarly, Cervantes’ play posits the beginnings of the Spanish empire in the destruction of Numantia. In both cases the outcome of the military struggle has been decided beforehand, by some power beyond the reach of the combatants. Within the context of Vergil’s society this kind of determinism is acceptable and requires no comment. In its modern version, however, in Counter-Reformation Spain where the primacy of free will had been vigorously affirmed by Trent, the insistence on the power of fate is indeed worthy of our attention. In Act I the river Duero informs España that Numantia’s fate is...
The Structure of Cervantine Ambiguity

81

The Structure of Cervantine Ambiguity

81

The Structure of Cervantine Ambiguity

81

The Structure of Cervantine Ambiguity

81

Glorious days to come, might have been derived from the Aeneid, I, 254-296. There is, I think, a more general relationship between the two works, which may be stated thus: The destruction of Numantia is to the Spanish empire in Cervantes as the destruction of Troy is to the Roman empire in Vergil.

As Rome — the heir of Troy — subjugated Greece, so in the sixteenth century did Spain — the heir of Numantia — subjugate Rome. In the most concrete possible terms, the sack of Rome in 1527 is prophesied in the play, as well as a vision of Rome at the mercy of the Duke of Alba in 1556. This is the glorious imperial present for which the destruction of Numantia so many years before has provided the mythic-heroic beginning and justification. Juan Bautista Avalle-Arce observes: "España... renueva la idea de Imperio, y sojuzga al heredero, a la propia Roma. La exaltación apocalíptica de las palabras del Dueño al describir la trayectoria imperial, le hacen considerar el saco de Roma de 1527 como un locus español. El regente imperio populus virgiliano late en estas afirmaciones, que dan al traste con las apolojías, excusas y coartadas históricas que reanudaran en su momento la opinión pública."

Cervantes is not alone in evoking the sack of Rome in these terms. An anonymous romance of the mid-sixteenth century also depicts Rome and the Romans not as the corrupt Christians of the present, but as the mighty conquerors of Antiquity, brought low.

Los tan famosos romanos
puestos so yugo y melenas:

El clamor de las matronas
los siete montes atruena,
viendo sus hijos vendidos,
sus hijas en mala estrena.

Conses y senadores
de quejas hacen su cena.

La gran soberbia de Roma.
hora España la refrena.

We might conclude, in fact, that by Cervantes' time there existed a kind of official version of these events in which Spain is likened to Rome, the imperial present is seen as valid and positive, and presumed national characteristics are discovered and exalted in a people only marginally related in fact to their supposed descendants. In short, we are dealing here with a mythologized version of history placed at the service of a mythologized vision of
the present. Let us now turn from myth to reality.

The siege of Numantia has an amazingly close historical analogue, much closer than the siege of Troy, in the siege of Masada by the Romans in 66 AD. The story, briefly, is the following. A group of Zealots, the most fanatical of the Jewish sects, in flight from the Roman destruction of Jerusalem, took refuge in King Herod’s mountaintop resort-treaty of Masada. It is a place of no exit, high above the Dead Sea. The Romans laid siege to the place and after two years were about to enter and claim victory. On the night before the walls were sure to be breached, the Zealot leader, one Eleazar, convinced his people to commit mass suicide rather than surrender. The Roman experience the following morning repeated that of Scipio at Numantia: a strange quiet, everything of value destroyed, a city populated only by corpses.

The story has come down to us in the work of the Roman historian and one-time Jewish commander — perhaps the first important converso — Flavius Josephus, in his De bello Judaico, a work practically contemporaneous with the events it describes. Josephus was enormously influential in Spanish letters from the Medieval period through the seventeenth century. María Rosa Lida has documented this influence in a series of articles published posthumously by Y. A. Malkiel. In the General estoria of Alfonso X, Josephus is accepted as an authority equal to SS. Eusebius and Jerome. In Fray Pedro de Rivadeniera’s Tratado del príncipe cristiano, I. 87, he is cited as the source of a well known exemplum. Fray Bartolomé de las Casas explains the Guatemalan Indian custom of selective cannibalism by reference to the authority of Josephus. Fray Luis de Granada, in the Introducción al símbolo de la fe, bases himself almost entirely on Josephus for his discussion of the destruction of Jerusalem, which becomes for him a proof of the divinity of Christ. Lope either cites Josephus’ authority or relics on his version in at least three places (Los pastores de Belén; Las grandezas de Alejandro; El villano en su rincón). Josephus’ De bello Judaico had been translated into Spanish by Alonso de Palencia (Sevilla, 1491; re-edited in 1532 and 1556) and again by the Valencian erasmista Juan Martí Corttore (Antwerpen: Martín Nuncio, 1557). Cervantes must certainly have had access to one of these translations. The parallels with La Numancia are simply too striking to be the result of chance.

Even before the Masada episode we may observe similarities and reminiscences. Scipio plans to starve Numantia into submission; in Act I (vv. 313-320). We learn from Josephus that Vespasian decided on the same course of action at Jotopata. “Vespasiano... se quiso poner a cercar la ciudad por tomarla por hambre; porque pensaba que, forzados por pobreza y hambre, se habian de rendir, o si querian ser pertinaces y portiators, que habian todos de perder de hambre; y que seria mucho mas facil tomarlos y combatirlos, si los dejan reposar un poco, haciendo que ellos mismos enlaquicieren y se disminuyese la fuerza de ellos con el hambre” (II. 8; vol. I, p. 375).

In Act III of the Numantians, realizing their situation is hopeless, decide to attack the Roman camp and die fighting (vv. 1242-1253). Similarly, the Jews at Jotopata prefer to die in combat rather than by starvation. “Los judios... creian que si ellos ni la ciudad se podia salvar, y antes desheraban morir peleando y en la guerra, que morir de hambre... armado de la desesperacion que toda la ciudad tenia... viendo que era linda cosa perder la vida por alcanzar laor y honra... muriendo al hacer alguna hazaña fuerte y valerosa” (III. 8; vol. I, pp. 376, 378).

When Josephus’ account reaches Masada, the analogies with La Numancia become intensified. Individual speakers come forward in both texts to summarize the situation and suggest, finally, the same course of action. The concerns expressed by the Numantine women in Act III are the same as those voiced by Eleazar in his harangue at Masada.

Mujer 2: ¿Queréis dejar, por ventura, a la romana arrogancia las virgenes de Numancia para mayor desventura? ¿Y a los libres hijos vuestros queís esclavos dejarlos? ¿No será mejor ahogarlos por los propios brazos vuestros: . . . ¿Serán por ajenas manos nuestras casas derribadas? Y las bodas esperadas, ¿hanlas de gozar romanos? (vv. 1310-1325)

Another woman, addressing herself rhetorically to the children, asks:

Deridles [a vuestros padres] que os engendraron libres, y libres nacistes. y que vuestras madres tristes también libres os criaron.
Decídles que pues la suerte
nuestra va tan decaída
que, como es dieron la vida,
ásimismo os deís la muerte.

(vv. 1346-1355)

Teógenes' harangue in Act III also recalls Eleazar's speech to his comrades at Masada:

Sólo se ha de mirar que el enemigo
no alcance de nosotros siervo o gloria,
antes ha de servir él de testigo
que apriete y eternice nuestra historia.
Y si todos venimos en lo que digo,
mi siglo 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 réquimas todas se echen luego.

(vv. 1418-1428)

Combining these speeches, we can isolate the following motifs or ideas. There should be nothing left for the enemy; valuables should be destroyed by fire. The sons should die before being sold into slavery, and the wives and daughters before being violated by the Romans. Self-destruction is a manifestation of liberty — a free action undertaken in a state of freedom. Eternal fame will result from these actions.

Let us now turn to Eleazar's harangue at Masada: "Pienso que Dios nos ha concedido la gracia de que podamos morir libres, lo cual no ha sido concedido a todos los otros que sin este propósito fueron vencidos y muertos. Nosotros tenemos la muerte y destrucción nuestra por muy cierta en amaneciendo. Libres, pues, somos en el género de muerte para nosotros y de nuestro afecto, porque no pueden esto prohibirnos los enemigos, que sólo desean prendernos vivos y vemos claramente sernos imposible vencerlos peleando... antes hemos perdido toda la esperanza por la voluntad de Dios. No esperemos nosotros que tomen de ello castigo los romanos, sino tomemoslo antes nosotros mismos por nuestras propias manos. Muérnan las mujeres sin ser injuriadas, y morirán los hijos sin experimentar qué cosa es servidumbre. Después de muertos estos, sirvámonos los unos a los otros guardando nuestra libertad, y encerrándola con nosotros en nuestras sepulturas; pero primero quememos y demos fuego al castillo y al dinero que dentro de él tenemos... Démonos prisa.

The aftermath of the collective suicide, its discovery by the Romans, is handled similarly by both Josephus and Cervantes, making the required allowance for the difference between exposition through dialogue and through narration. In the play, Scipio himself remarks the strangeness of what is obviously a new situation (vv. 2191-2195). The horrible reality is discovered by Marius, who goes over the wall and reports to Jugurta (vv. 2216-2220). Marius finally remarks on the destruction of valuables by fire, and on the eternal fame the Numantians have won by their actions:

El lamentable fin y triste historia
de la ciudad invicta de Numancia
merece ser eterna en la memoria.

... En medio de la plaza levantado
está un ardiente fuego temeroso,
de sus cuerpos y haciendas sustentado.

(vv. 2261-2281)

Josephus' account is similarly succinct and grisly. "Los romanos, que aguardaban ayun y pensaban haber de pelear, venda la mañana juntaban sus montes con los puentes de las escaleras, y acometían el muro, pero no viendo alguno de sus enemigos, y sí por todas partes gran soledad, y el fuego con tan gran silencio, no podían imaginar ni saber lo que había sido hecho... Los romanos todavía no creían esto tan fácilmente, por no creer que se hubiesen arriesgado a tanto los judíos; pero trabajaban en matar el fuego, y siguiendo su camino por donde el fuego venía, llegaron al palacio real, y viendo tan gran muchedumbre de muertos, no se dieron de ello, como debían, por ser sus enemigos; antes se maravillaban de ver un consejo y determinación de tan cruelidad, y un menosprecio tan obstinado en tan gran número de gente, para darse la muerte" (VII, 28; vol. I, p. 359).

In the bitterly divided society inhabited by Cervantes and his contemporaries, whose divisions of caste and class are briefly alluded to in the play, it was easy for converso intellectuals to appreciate the situation of the Jews at Masada and even to identify with them. Josephus' own status as converso facilitates this identification. If the Jews at Masada come to stand for the oppressed minorities in sixteenth-century Spain, the Numantians in Cervantes' play may also seem to represent the same groups. In this
context, the Romans in both Josephus and Cervantes come to represent the oppressor, the Old Christian majority destined to triumph, the power structure organized to keep undesirables such as Cervantes and his contemporary Mateo Aleman firmly excluded. The Romans, in short, become everything repressive, totalitarian and imperialistic in Cervantes’ own society.

We could have made the equation between the Romans and the official sixteenth-century Spaniards without recourse to Josephus. Valle-Arce and Marie Lafranque in particular have already made the point, and we shall discuss their contributions presently. The reference to Josephus, the striking similarities between Numancia and Masada, and the symbolic applicability of the two sides to the opposing forces in Cervantes’ society, however, suggests and validates the “negative vision of empire” from an unexpected perspective. This in turn leads us to ponder the realities of the Spanish empire and its evocation in our play.

Marie Lafranque offers a particularly striking vision of the historical continuity between the Roman and the Holy Roman (Hapsburg) empires as she describes the interior of the royal chapel at Innsbruck, where the busts of the Roman emperors gaze down on those of their Hapsburg successors. She concludes: “On peut sourire: aujourd’hui de cette correspondance primordiale, presque sacrée pour les maîtres du monde du XVIIe siècle. Entre Rome et l’Empire dont l’Espagne est désormais le centre, elle marque la continuité recherchée, et imprimée par leur dynastie dans l’imagination comme dans l’idéologie de ce temps.”

Juan Bautista Valle-Arce brings this continuity within the scope of La Numancia in his discussion of Scipio’s harangue to his decimated army in the first act: “La solidaridad de la idea imperial hace que Cervantes atribuya... a los romanos movciones propias de la España quincentista, ya que guerra justa es el concepto que agobia el pensamiento de militares, políticos y moralistas de la época. Y en forma recíproca y táctica, la guerra justa de los españoles imperiales presupone la renovatio individual y nacional... Los nuevos (renovados) romanos de la prédica de Escipión, se harán dignos del Imperio, y este Imperio será renovado, con mayor gloria aún, por los españoles... Estos dos aspectos de la renovatio... son dirigidos y arañados en su marcha hacia la meta de la España imperial por el destino... El escollero se ha salvado, ad maiorem Hispaniae gloriam, y la obra queda en marcha.”

For my part, I should like to call attention to two minor and apparently insignificant incongruities in Scipio’s harangue which have the effect of identifying his Roman legions with the Spanish tercio. The first is olfactory:

No me huele el soldado otros olores
que el olor de la pez y de resina

no quiero otro primor ni otra fragancia,
en tanto que español viva en Numancia.

The Spanish soldier with his perfumed gloves was a stock character in extra and even intra-peninsular satire throughout the sixteenth century. Later Scipio Remarks:

Cada cual fabrica su destino;
no tiene allí fortuna alguna parte;
la peteca, fortuna baja chta;
la diligencia, imperio y monarquía.

The reference to free will is not necessarily out of place in this particular context, but the identification of empire with monarchy is surely more appropriate to Felipe II and his armies in Flanders than to the Roman republic Scipio is supposed to represent. Neither was the Roman empire simultaneously an empire and a monarchy, but the Spanish one was.

The reference to Felipe II and Flanders suggests at once the reason expressed in the play for Numancia’s obdurate stance and the real, historical referent for the dramatic situation. During the first Numantine embassy to Scipio their spokesman resumes the situation and suggests that the succession of ruthless and greedy consuls imposed by Rome, and not Roman law itself, is really responsible for the rebellion (vv. 211-218). Jorge Mañach observes parenthetically that this motivation is “históricamente algo discutible.” This situation, the distant province of differing language and customs, the faraway central authority whose representatives come one after another and are experienced as cruel and rapacious, recalls most strongly that of the Low Countries in the second half of the sixteenth century, where a succession of imperial governors (Alba, Luis de Requesens, Don Juan de Austria, Alessandro Farnese) was finally unsuccessful in bringing the locals to heel. In this context it is not unreasonable to see in the Romans of the play a representation of the Spaniards and their imperial allies in Flanders.

It is perhaps in this sense and from this perspective that we should consider the possible influence of Fray Antonio de Guevara. The practice of editorializing on contemporary (sixteenth century) events by placing them in the imaginative context of the Roman empire and taking advantage of the “imperial parallel,” or renovatio, to use Valle-Arce’s term, to suggest the real
The Structure of Cervantine Ambiguity 89

A more recent Spanish historian is moved to associate Leyden with Numantia itself: “La población de Leiden, sitiada por Fabrique de Toledo, después de haber tomado Haarlem, seguía cercada por las fuerzas españoles, puestas a las órdenes de Francisco Valdés. Se realizaron trabajos muy notables de circunvalación, en tanto que los sitiados, a las órdenes de Van der Does, se disponían a efectuar una defensa numantina.”

The same historian, an officer in General Franco’s army, describes the sack of Antwerp, an episode which gave rise to the expression furia española, as “muy triste, vergonzosa (incluso) para nuestra historia.” The same sense of shame is felt. I think, but not expressed, by our contemporary chronicler of the event, Don Bernadino de Mendoza: “A nuestros soldados no se les pudo impedir el saco de la tierra, habiéndola ganado por fuerza, a cuya causa sus cabezas mandaron no se hiciera rescate de las personas, y los bienes no se sacasen fuera de la villa. Con lo cual obligaron a los soldados a darlos a sus dueños mismos por poco dinero. Juntemente se mandó a las parroquias enteras los cuerpos muertos que estaban en las casas, que fueron, según la relación, dos mil y quinientos, sin los quemados y ahogados, que estimaba ser doblado número.”

Until the chilling statistics of the last sentence, Don Bernardino presents a very model of military discipline, civic sense of order, and general restraint. Obviously the sack and accompanying slaughter of inhabitants was a shameful episode, and Don Bernardino knew it and attempted to gloss it over. This is the ugly reality against which the high-sounding, patriotic references in La Numancia to the sack of Rome must be set.

With this juxtaposition of the sack of Rome and that of Antwerp we have come full circle and are now in a position to discuss the underlying structure of conflicting associations which determines the ambiguous "meanings" of La Numancia. Let us recapitulate. The Numantians in the play grew up to be the Spaniards, just as the heroic defenders of Troy in the Aeneid grew up to be the Romans, so that the play suggests a positive vision of the Spanish empire of ca. 1580. However, the Romans in the play also grew up to be the Spaniards; cruel, imperialistic, in no sense the bearers of a superior civilization. The Romans in the play are like the Spaniards in Flanders and like the Romans at Masada as reported

thrust of the anti-imperialist message, had been firmly established in 1529, when Guevara’s “Villano del Danubio” appeared before Marcus Aurelius and discussed problems of colonial administration in America. With this in mind it becomes relatively easy to establish an analogy to the effect that the Danube is to America in Guevara as Numantia is to Flanders in Cervantes. In addition to this concrete rhetorical and tactical parallel, it is worth recalling the general community of interests and sympathies between the Bishop of Mondoñedo and Cervantes evoked and studied by Francisco Márquez.

The particular events of the wars in Flanders which Cervantes might have recalled as he sat down to write La Numancia are probably the siege of Haarlem (1572-73), that of Leyden (1571), and of course the sack of Antwerp by mutinous Spanish troops on 1 November 1576. Antonio Domínguez Ortiz describes the siege of Haarlem as “epic,” and Edward Grierson is more specific. “Yet Haarlem held out for nine months,” he writes. “This is one of the great stories of human endurance which it is impossible to recall without emotion. Even the case-hardened Spaniards showed a grudging admiration for the endurance of the town under months of almost constant bombardment, and we may share their point of view as we read of the assaults, the subterranean battles in the saps and mines below the walls, the desperate, and to the Spaniards, novel, skating forays on the ice; the slow grind of starvation as the spring thaw cut off the relief from Orange’s camp.” Again, with reference to the “slow grind of starvation.” Grierson recalls: “Haarlem, where the last loaves of bread in the starving city had been tossed in defiance into the Spanish camp.”

A policy of starvation also played an important role in the finally unsuccessful siege of Leyden. Don Bernardino de Mendoza reports from his perspective among the imperial besiegers: “Los de Leiden pasaron tan terrible hambre, que comieron todos suerte de animales vivos que tenían, afirmando los mismos de la villa el haber muerto mujeres por no ser harta la cantidad de la comida que se les daba para alimentar la criatura: de donde se puede juzgar con cuánta obstinación procedían en su error y rebeldía.” The anecdote of the starving women and babies comes to life in La Numancia, when the starving mother asks the child clasped to her breast:

¿Qué mamas, triste criatura?
¿No sientes que, a mi despecho,
sacas ya del flaco pecho
por leche, la sangre pura?
Lleva la carne a pedazos.
by Josephus. Thus there is also a negative vision of the Spanish empire of ca. 1580. The simultaneous double and conflicting valences—the positive and negative visions of Felipe's empire that coexist in the play—are made possible by the double confrontation of past vs. present, the myth vs. reality. The work establishes two temporal axes: the past of 133 BC and the present of 1580 AD. The prophecy of the Duceto at the conclusion of Act I makes this explicit. Along each of these temporal axes is arrayed an opposition between myth and reality. The members of these oppositions exist by reference to facts, documents, and literary works outside La Novanza and never mentioned explicitly. Thus, the mythical past referable to Virgilius is opposed by the real past referable to Josephus. The mythical present, the entire "Hispania viatrix" syndrome featuring the sack of Rome, is opposed by the real present, the brutal and fruitless wars in Flanders featuring the sack of Antwerp.

Finally, we may discuss the essential ambiguity of La Novanza by reference to the concepts of surface and deep structure. Cervantes' text is a surface structure with certain concrete particularities. Its meaning as such, strictly speaking, is limited to the particulars it presents: the Celtiberian city of Numantia, the Romans, the tragically impossible love between Lira and Marando, the collective suicide of the Numantians, the final encounter between Scipio and Batiato which results in the latter's leap to his death and reaffirms the validity of the earlier mass suicide. Its larger meanings—the vision it offers of the Spanish empire of 1580, the themes of fate and free will, and the like—are perceived by reference to the complex and contradictory deep structure we have been examining. This in turn consists of a series of positive and complementary negative associations—to Virgilius and Troy, to Alfonso de Valdés and Rome; to Josephus and Masaia; and to Bernardino de Mendoza and Flanders—which are arranged into two sets (present and past) and of binary oppositions (myth and reality). This arrangement ensures that however we attempt to penetrate the surface of La Novanza in search of the author's ideological profile, we are confronted by two contradictory possibilities of interpretation. A "correct" reading, in the sense of establishing the superiority of one possibility over the other, is simply not possible. Nor, I think Cervantes would affirm, was it meant to be.

NOTES


6. "De principio que en el suelo va por tan justo nivel, / sí que se puede esperar / de que sean obras del cielo." Libro IV, ed. J. B. Avalle-Arce, Glosario Castellanos, I. 142; also II, 35-40.

7. "¿Por dónde comenzar a exagerar tus lágrimas, después que te llamarán padre de las religiones y defensor de la fe? Quedar las atrapas, donde se concentra el oro que dice que recogés, nos muestra que tu tesoro en el cielo lo escondías." Cited by Américo Castro, "Los prólogos al Quijote, in Hacia Cervantes, 3a ed. (Madrid: Taurus, 1967), 291-295. See also pp. 312, 408, 459 and 461. See also his "Cervantes y el Quijote a nua lura," in Cervantes y los castizismos españoles (Madrid: Alianza, 1987), 87-99 and 133. They are the very verses is also pointed out by Robert Marrast in his introduction to our text (ed. cit., pp. 7-8). Castro has even suggested that Felipe de Carrizales, the unsympathetic husband in El turbamento estremoso, is named for Felipe II. In the first version of the story the young wife's name is Isabel, which suggests to Castro the King's marriage to Isabel de Valois. See "El turbamento estremoso," in Hacia Cervantes, ed. cit., p. 121.


11. In a subtle way the play actually may be seen to insist on the primacy of free will. The constant references to fate are offset by repeated acts of will. These include the Numantians' plans for engaging the Romans, Matamoros single-handed assault on their camp, the individual suicides of Marquino and Banton and the collective suicide of the Trojans. Free will should not be confused with the ability to control circumstances and to make one's will prevail. The play demonstrates that the choice-making process goes on, even in a context suffocated by the power of destiny. In this sense suicide becomes a positive affirmation, in that specifically Christian structure on the exercise of free will are left far behind. This interpretation is available to any twentieth-century reader familiar with the rhetoric of existentialism. I prefer to discuss this point, however, in its relevant historical context which is of course post-Second and Catholic. See Jorge Mañach, El sentido trágico de la Numancia (La Habana: Publicaciones de la Academia Cubana de la Lengua, 1959); B. W. Wardropper, "Comedias," in Nova Cervantina, ed. J. B. Avalle-Ace and E. C. Reit (London: Tamesis, 1973), pp. 166-167.

12. The Roman characterization of the Greeks as untrustworthy and devious, really to take advantage of the good will and gall妇liness of the Trojans, which we have seen is present in La Numancia, is already developed by Aristides de Morale, in his obra VIII, as "Cecilia, a la que los romanos no se pisan, y va en los otros tres veces para engañarlos," ed. cit., vol. IV, p. 79.


14. Juan Bautista Avall-Ace, "Poesía, Historia, imperialismo. La Numancia," Anuario de Letras de la UNAM, 2 (1961): 57-58. This study continues to be, in my opinion, the essential point of departure for discussion of these topics.

15. Quoted by Marcel Bataillon, Ensino España (México: FCE, 1966), 381.

16. Josephus was the commander at Joratata. He was captured along with some other high-ranking officers when the city fell to the Romans. He was enticed by them to go over to their side, which he decided to do. His friends, however, accused him of perfidy and cowardice, and suggested that he commit suicide. Josephus agreed and was chosen. Josephus wrote down his own experiences in the account of his own actions.


19. Ibid., p. 294.


21. Idem. "La dinastía de los mariscos," RPH, 10 (1957): 185-196. María Rosa Lida de Malkiel provides a compact summary of the many sixteenth and seventeenth-century writers who were in some way indebted to Josephus and whose relation to him was discussed and analyzed by María Rosa Lida. See Y. M. M. "Las fuentes de los estudios hispánicos de la historia de la cultura de la literatura española," JAR, 21 (1956), 307-308.

22. Cervantes' version has been re-edited five times. Petipaig, 1608; Madrid, 1616; Madrid, 1797; Madrid, Vida de Hernández, 1891. All my references are to this last, edition. I quote at great length from this unfamiliar text to emphasize the parallels with La Numancia.

23. España remarks, "Por sus famosos riegos y valientes, cada uno de sus distintos" (1775:3576), surely to reference the conflicting, divided society experienced by Cervantes and his contemporaries. The unity of the Numantians has been seen as the exception to the ancient rule of simple. See William Whibley, "The Sacrifice theme in Cervantes' Numancia," Hispanica, 45 (1962), 294. It has not so surprisingly, been seen as an ironic condemnation of the complacency of the sixteenth-century Spain caused by conflicting classes and classes. Alfredo Hernández, La tragedia en el Renacimiento español (Barcelona: Planeta, 1974). I quote from the extensive review by R. R. MacCus, BCOM, 27 (1957), 136.

24. M. Laflamme, Art. cit., p. 278. In the same study she remarks the general similarities between the Romans and the Spanish armies, habitually engaged in long campaigns far from the center of empire, and how the former was considered a model by the latter (p. 284).


26. Schvitz and Bonté mark that Appian had reported that Sertorius probably used the soldiers in their bath and kept them down with oil. "Pero Cervantes parece recordar mejor las costumbres que tenían en el siglo XVI algunos milites de Germania leaders de las guarniciones de las guarniciones." Cervantes, Comedias y entremeses, vol. V, p. 280.


28. While this study was awaiting publication, William King's excellent Cervantes' Numancia and Imperial Spain appeared in MLA, 94 (1979), 200-224. Prof. King remarks, "the massive confluence of the Araucanian with Numancia", and demonstrates the flat Spanish imperialism as practiced in the New World, as well as in the Old, is present below the surface of Cervantes' text. Encilla's epigraph offers a counterbalance to Virgil's.

29. See also the Cervantine references in Roman, Hebrew, and the


32. D. Bernardino de Mendoza, Comentarios de lo sucedido en la guerra de los Países Bajos desde el año de 1567 hasta el de 1577 (Madrid, 1592). In B.IF, vol. XXVIII (Madrid: Rivadeneyra, 1853), 136.

33. The capitan refers quite specifically to his adventures in Flanders: "Tuve noticias que el gran duque de Alba pasaba a Flandes. Mudé propósito, luíme con él, servíle en las jornadas que hizo, halléme en la muerte de los condes Egüemon y Hornos" (Edmont and Horn, executed 5 June 1568), Don Quijote, I, 39.


35. Mendoza, op. cit., p. 323.


37. Ibid., p. 107

38. Mendoza, op. cit., p. 350. For an American, reading Mendoza's accounts of the campaign evokes nothing so much as the Viet Nam war beamed into our homes not long ago. There are even amazing coincidences of detail. The descriptions of heavily armed infantrymen slogging through water up to their armpits, being fired upon by a concealed enemy, some drowning from the weight of their sophisticated equipment were all familiar to me before I read Mendoza.