Epics on the Early Modern Stage: Shakespeare's *Henry V* and Cervantes's *La Numancia*

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Introduction

Surprisingly little has appeared in print that directly compares the works of William Shakespeare (1564-1616) and Miguel de Cervantes (1547-1616), two men often celebrated among the greatest writers ever in their respective languages. They lived and died at the same time, with both men's date of death traditionally given as 23 April 1616.[1] Both Shakespeare and Cervantes lived and wrote during times of great national importance politically and militarily, and the significance of what was occurring around them certainly resonated in their works. Both writers also wished to portray their perception of their era on stage. In Early Modern Europe, epic poetry was deemed the noblest form of writing, but it simply was not the most practical way to entertain a population, the majority of whom would not be able to read the product. Instead, they opted to dive into the quasi-legendary past of their respective countries and present their epic visions on stage in *Henry V* (1599) and *La destrucción de Numancia* (c. 1583).

For the purposes of this study, I will identify certain common characteristics of epic poetry and how Shakespeare and Cervantes employ them in their plays; however, literary genre is fluid, and these two writers had demonstrated a desire to innovate, along with an aversion to conforming to the norms. There exists a clear link between tragedy, history and epic, which has been studied at length, and Shakespeare and Cervantes, writing in eras of transition in terms of society and dramatic composition, form generic hybrids that include common epic tropes. Epics were an oft-used medium to laud a nation's historical achievements, and both the plays in question follow these threads to a certain degree.

However, epic is not all that it seems, particularly in its adapted stage form, written by intelligent men, educated formally or informally, who were well aware of the power of the visual medium. A full-length play affords certain advantages to playwrights that those wishing to publish in print do not enjoy. Most notable is being able to write and perform a work with certain social or political references in a very short period of time, as opposed to print, which could take many more months with more stringent censorship, finding a printer, typesetting, revisions and marketing. In this article, I will also explore counter-epic discourse in these two very famous plays, indicating that they relied on the principal components of epic, but perhaps with the intention of providing, sometimes subtly, criticisms of the society they appear to be glorifying.

Although Cervantes is known best internationally for *Don Quixote*, published in two parts in 1605 and 1615, he began his prolific writing career many years earlier as a playwright and produced numerous works in addition to his great novel. During this first period of writing, the early to mid 1580s, Cervantes composed his historical tragedy *La destrucción de Numancia*, often referred to simply as *La Numancia*; the precise dates of its composition and performance have been lost to history. The story of the small but powerful Celtiberian city in northern Spain which repelled the advance of the sophisticated Roman army for nearly twenty years before its conquest in 133 BC had already formed an established component of Spanish lore. In fact, Spanish histories and oral ballads that retell this story promulgated the notion that Spaniards of the sixteenth century considered the Numantians as their forefathers. Cervantes's play, the

[1] Spain adopted the Gregorian Calendar in 1582, whereas England would not do so until 1752, so Shakespeare likely died 10 or 11 days after Cervantes.

first known dramatic representation of Numancia, establishes a direct link between his own people and the inhabitants of the doomed city that withstood a siege implemented by the famous general, Scipio Aemilianus Africanus the Younger (Cipión in Cervantes's play), for several months before deciding to take their own lives and frustrate the Romans' aim at complete conquest.[2]

The discussion of epic in relation to Shakespeare is more problematic, as many scholars have clung to Ben Jonson's assertion that Shakespeare had little Latin and less Greek. Given the scarce use of the term "epic" in relation to poetry in the English language in this era, with the term heroic poetry being more common, the lack of knowledge of Shakespeare's education and what it might have consisted of and the few references to the great works of antiquity in his plays, we could be forgiven for holding firm onto the notion that epic was not important to Shakespeare. However, "studies have shown the depth and subtlety of his responses to Virgil and to Homer, with the result that 'Shakespeare and Epic' now looks like a subject of study rather than an empty set" (Burrow 2018, p. 31). Burrows's study on the subject "enables us to position Shakespeare within the history of the concept of heroic writing and to cast light on a range of moments in his plays which appear to imitate Virgil or Homer, but which have often made critics uneasy about the tone and intent of those imitations" (32-33). Irrespective of the rarity of the word epic in late sixteenth-century English, for the purposes of this study I will retain it, given the propensity for current scholarship to accept that Shakespeare had knowledge of the concept, and indeed imitated it.[3]

Shakespeare's stage epics contain more layers than Cervantes's, covering eight plays that recount the civil strife in England from the reign of Richard II which ended in 1399 to the establishment of the Tudor dynasty with the defeat of Richard III in Bosworth Field at the hands of Henry VII in 1485. Bookended by two Richards, the other six plays carry the names of Henry IV (two parts), V and VI (three parts), thus lending the name of the *Henriad* to the collection and associating the story etymologically to Homer's *Iliad* and Virgil's *Aeneid*. This is, of course, a phrase applied centuries after the plays' composition, but the term imitates epic poetry and is indicative of the overall structure of the collection. Standing out within the eight plays is *Henry V*, the only one that does not rely on English-upon-English violence for its plot. Rather it appears to exalt the exploits of the great warrior king who, like Numancia in Spain, had become legendary at the time of the play's composition in 1599. Henry V was heralded as a model of English virtue and kingship by the sources available at the time. Shakespeare seems to exploit the patriotic fervour of this Lancastrian king and his invasion of France to solidify his support for the aging Tudor Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603), perhaps currying favour along the way from his benefactors. However, does the play ultimately endorse the Tudor myth, the

[2] There are two conflicting versions of the demise of the historical city of Numancia, which are as follows: 1) The Numantians valiantly fight the Romans for their own existence for twenty years. Scipio Aemilianus, famed for his defeat and final destruction of Carthage in the Third Punic War in 146 BC, arrives as consul in 134 BC to end the long and humiliating war. He decides that Rome will no longer engage the Numantians in battle; rather, he builds a wall around the city, blocks any aid that might come through, and after several months of starvation, the remaining Numantians surrender. Scipio has enough prisoners and arms to take back to Rome, parade through the city and claim an official military triumph, for which he gains the honorary surname of Numantinus to add to his Africanus. All pay homage to the Numantian's valiant defence, but they cannot be left independent. 2) After several months of siege-induced famine and disease, the remaining Numantians, knowing that if they surrender those who are not executed will live in bondage for the rest of their lives, create a massive bonfire in the city centre. They allow the flames to consume their armour, their riches, and finally, themselves. They commit mass suicide, making the free choice to die and live eternally in the people's memory rather than living as someone else's slaves. In this version, often studied in comparison to the events of Masada some 200 years later, Scipio has nothing to take back to Rome. Those who physically die are morally victorious, and those alive are left morally destroyed.

[3] Among studies on Shakespeare and epic poetry are Randall (1987); Álvarez Faedo (1997); James (1997); James (2001); Coppola (2009); Wilson-Okamura (2010), Burrow (2013); Demetriou and Pollard (2017).

dynasty's divine right to rule England, or is it a more cautionary tale about the justice of one's actions, particularly as it would have been quite well known that the Tudors' grasp on the throne, which in 1599 had lasted nearly 114 years, would soon be coming to an end.

Both playwrights consulted the historical record for information to infuse in their plots, even if some aspects get lost in the translation from page to stage. They certainly benefited from the chronological distance between events and stage representation. Cervantes had numerous historical sources at his disposal, with the most complete being Amrosio de Morales's *Corónica general de España* (1574); he also had access to contemporary Spanish translations of Classical historians who told the tale of the Numantine Wars and numerous *romances*, ballads from the oral tradition that often recounted Spanish history. Shakespeare's principal source for his history plays has long been identified as Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* (1587), which informed the dramatic incarnation of the English king from nearly two centuries earlier.[4]

By choosing, or perhaps inventing, the history play, particularly as it relates to tragedy and to epic poetry, both writers would be expected to create exemplary characters in their works. Selecting well-known historical events as the central plot to their plays should naturally lead to this end: clear representation along moral lines of aspects of collective national heritage that would invoke pride and celebration on the one hand and fear and pity on the other. However, Shakespeare and Cervantes created complicated characters, layered with ambiguous statements and characterisations, which are revealed, sometimes extremely subtly, by the issues surrounding their actions and words. Slotting their stories into the framework of multiple generic forms, both implicit and explicit, this article explores how the theatrical genres of history and tragedy inform the epic nature of *Henry V* and *La Numancia*. Furthermore, I examine the question of why these writers in this particular era made the conscious decision to fashion their version of history in this innovative manner, while producing multiple interpretations.

Although this article focuses on the epic qualities, epic is the imitated genre in these theatrical pieces, written to be seen and heard, rather than read. There are multiple pieces of evidence that Shakespeare's *Henry V* was performed upon its composition in 1599 and into the following year. It was first published as a Quarto in 1600 and, of course formed part of the First Folio of 1623, albeit with textual variations.[5] There is less evidence of the performance of Cervantes's *Numancia*, with the only reference coming from Cervantes himself, when he tells his readers that the play formed part of his earliest collection of some twenty or thirty plays that he had written before the meteoric rise in popularity of Lope de Vega and the *comedia nueva*.[6] He claims in the prologue to a collection of plays and comic interludes published in 1615, over thirty years later, that *La Numancia* was received positively and without being subjected to rotten vegetables being hurled by the audience towards the stage. He repeats his reference to the play in *Don Quixote* I.48 and in the "Adujunta al Parnaso" (1614), indicating

[4] The amount of ink spilled on the study of history, or historiography, in relation to these two plays is too immense to detail here. A humble beginning for such an endeavour is to consult the following: For *La Numancia*, see Beck (2013), Kahn (2007, 2008), Kluge (2019), Schmidt (2019), Shivers (1970), Simerka (1998, 2000), and Triplette (2021). For *Henry V*, see Clegg (2003), Gurr (2012), Kernan (1969), Rackin (2003), Smallwood (1986) and Taylor (2008).

[5] Gary Taylor's extensive introduction, notes and appendices in the Oxford World's Classics edition provide exhaustive commentary on the variations between the different versions of the text.

[6] In the film *Lope* (2010) directed by Andrucha Waddington, Cervantes's *Numancia* is so awful that the theatre owner asks Lope de Vega to revise the play so that it is suitable to perform. This fictional event would have happened when Lope was in his late teens; we can take an educated guess at how Cervantes would react to such a portrayal of events.

that it was one of his works he held in highest esteem. The piece was not published until 1784, nearly 200 years after its creation.[7]

The generic juxtaposition of the history play, tragedy and the epic leads to multiple ends that prove entertaining and informative to the audience, while also permitting the playwrights to comment on the hot political topics of their day. Shakespeare and Cervantes were well aware of the cultural and historical magnitude of the epic poem, including knowledge of the ancient classics, such as the Homeric poems and Virgil's *Aeneid*, and those written and published in their own eras, such as *La Araucana* (1569, 1578, 1589) by Alonso de Ercilla, *Gerusalemme liberata* (1581) by Torquato Tasso and *The Faerie Queene* (1590) by Edmund Spenser. Both writers masterfully incorporate form and structure of what can be considered content for a national epic within the scenes of their respective plays. The aspects of epic poetry that I will develop in this comparative study include the following:

- A plotline of national importance, rooting the themes in a shared heritage.
- A central hero who embodies the values of the civilization, and whose actions are intended to be exemplary. The hero follows the heroic code, which places value on honour, leadership, courage, physical strength and the acceptance of one's fate.[8]
- A beginning *in media res*, often with the invocation of a muse, delineating a purpose for the tale to be told.
- Themes related to war, in which the hero must engage, even if reluctantly, for the sake of national defence and glory.
- The development of a just-war paradigm, guided by fate with the intervention of the divine or the supernatural in human affairs.
- A teleological sense of imperfection in the central heroes that ultimately leads to their premature death or downfall, although this downfall is necessary for the coming of the nation's Golden Age. This is related to the Aristotelian concept of *hamartia*, or an error in judgement, or a tragic flaw, that proves catastrophic.

As we delve deeper into this comparative analytical reading of these two famous theatrical works, what becomes most glaringly apparent is the lack of clarity. Two playwrights, known for their linguistic precision in rhyme, rhythm and imagery, their connections with the *zeitgeist*, their knowledge of history, cultural references, classical citations, and more, composed works that have produced multiple interpretations; in some cases, the scholarly conclusions have been diametrically opposed to one another, forming analytical factions. Regarding *La Numancia*, I have extensively discussed how varied the critical response has been, particularly from the late twentieth century to the present (Kahn 2008; particularly Chapter II). In reference to *Henry V*, Clegg describes the play as "a critical no man's land, acrimoniously contested and periodically disfigured by opposing barrages of intellectual artillery" (2003, 185). I will address the question, then, of what the meaning of this ambiguity represents, both in terms of the structure of the respective plays and their most prominent characters. If we recognize components and characteristics commonly associated with epic poetry, then the conflicting interpretations of the plays cause us to also consider the counter-epic, or anti-epic, discourse that seeps to the surface.

[7] Cervantes's *La Numancia* exists in two different anonymous manuscripts, one in the Bibilioteca Nacional de España in Madrid and the other in the Hispanic Society of America in New York. The 1784 publication, which reproduces the manuscript on New York, follows the rediscovery of the play, which was attributed to Cervantes because of his own references to a play by the same title that he wrote in the early 1580s. Schevill and Bonilla (1920) were the first to include all the discrepancies of the two manuscripts in the same edition.

[8] I would like to thank Helena Kahn for suggesting I explore the heroic code in reference to Achilles in the *Iliad*.

The counter-epic refers to literature that responds to form, convention and the heroic intentions of the epic, but in a manner that can negatively criticise and scrutinise the very imperial enterprise that it appears to celebrate. Barbara Simerka's still seminal monograph on counter-epic literature in Early Modern Spain demonstrates that the works she analyses "deploy a revisioning of epic values in order to examine a particular aspect of early modern martial aristocratic discourse" (2003, 4). Simerka includes *La Numancia* within the discussion that viewpoints on religion, empire and even literature were far from monolithic, and given the context in which Cervantes wrote his play, it becomes clear that his history play is unique. It was written at a time of oscillations of popularity of King Philip II (1556-1598) and his imperial policies, including his controversial assumption of the Portuguese throne in 1580; this polemical issue is referred to more than once in the play and has formed a framework around which this play has been labelled as opposing Philip II's imperial policies.[9] Likewise, Cervantes was writing at a time of transition in the Spanish theatrical scene, and with the rise in popularity of Lope de Vega's *comedia nueva* in the following years, we see the singularity of *La Numancia* even more pronounced.[10]

With *Henry V*, referred to indirectly in Simerka's book when she discusses the *Henriad*, Shakespeare also wrote at a time of anticipated political transition, and perhaps this is reflected in how he constructed his theatrical epic. Phyllis Rackin's invaluable study on Shakespeare's history plays evaluates them as an "experimental genre" that "incorporates a variety of structures that elude traditional general classification" (27; cited in Simerka 2003, 80). Simerka further summarises Rackin by stating that she "asserts that ambivalent dramatization offers the theater audience an opportunity for active intellectual engagement with competing political ideologies (29)" (80). Finally, "[Rackin] also identifies conservative and oppositional political ideologies coexisting in the *Henriad*. This series of plays attempts to provide a coherent historical explanation of the War of the Roses, giving voice to both traditional, Providential notions of historical causation that celebrate the outcome of the wars (thus validating the Tudor ascension to the throne) as well as Machiavellian interpretations of historical events that could be seen as a challenge to the legitimacy of the Tudor reign (29, 51)" (81).

Adding another layer of analysis is David Quint's discussion on what he identifies as the epic of the winner and the epic of the loser.[11] These classifications are distinguished by the perspective of the narration, or, in other words, the side of the conflict with whom we the readers are meant to sympathise most. An epic of the winner views the plot and action of the poem from the point of view of the growing imperial power, often glorifying the advance of the civilization due to martial conquest. The epic of the loser has the protagonist or protagonists form part of the conquered community, often sacrificing their own existence for the future good. The commonality among the epic, the counter-epic, the epic of the winner and the epic

[9] The analytical foundations for an anti-Philippine reading of Spanish drama of the 1570s and 1580s were established by Anthony Watson's 1971 book in which he studies the plays of Cervantes's contemporary, Juan de la Cueva, which were written, performed and published between 1579 and 1583. This forms the basis for subsequent studies; in my 2006 article, I apply this reading to a wider group of prominent playwrights from this pre-Lopean era, including Cervantes. Burguillo (2011) outlines why he disagrees with Watson's thesis (363-365), and points to me specifically as the person who "ha propuesto el mayor número de interpretaciones teatrales antifilipinas que existe" (372). In 2012, Moreno Hernández also takes issue with my interpretation of *La Numancia* as being critical of Philip II's absorption of Portugal into his dominions; however I counter his claims a year later using evidence-based analysis (Kahn 2013, 144-147). I maintain that neither Burgillo nor Moreno Hernández's interpretations preclude my own.

[10] In my 2008 monograph on *La Numancia*, I base my reading of Cervantes's play on this lack of clarity, including chapters on the theatrical context in which the play was written, ambiguities in themes and genre, and representation of the historical record on stage. For an effective exploration of drama before the *comedia nueva*, see Johnson (1981).

[11] See the Introduction to Quint's book for a thorough explanation of these concepts and how he applies them to epic poetry.

of the loser, lies in the structure of the narration and the characters; the divergence appears in the likely rationale behind the writers' literary choices.

At the centre of the epic poem is the epic hero, typically a single person who serves as a microcosm for the entire plotline, but counter-epics, and epics of the loser, can have an epic anti-hero, a central character who has an antagonistic presence in the narrative. Epic heroes are the model of virtue and humility, and they command the respect, loyalty and obedience of their followers and enemies alike. We as the readers care what happens to them and feel empathy towards their cause. They have exemplary attributes that we should strive to emulate, whereas epic anti-heroes contain the stature and power of the hero but are misguided in their journey. Unknown to both the hero and anti-hero they will also suffer a premature demise. This fall results from a flaw, although the flaw is not necessarily of their own making and nor can they counteract it. Here we recognise the intersection of epic and tragedy, when *hamartia* inflicts a metaphorical wound to the epic hero, or anti-hero, ending their physical life or their moral existence. Destiny, the all-powerful force that in Antiquity could not even be altered by the Gods, dictates that epic heroes must fall in order for the glory of some future empire to flourish. The heroic code requires heroes to follow their destiny and promises divine castigation for those who attempt to craft their own fate.

Henry V and *La Numancia* and Staging the Epic

Shakespeare sets the epic tone of *Henry V* immediately through the words of his Chorus, a quasi-allegorical figure who serves the function of the epic narrator of events and establishes Henry as the epic hero. Setting this play apart from the other seven in the *Henriad* as an epic within the epic, the playwright relies on this narrator character to invoke the imagination of the people as opposed to using the spectacle of the stage and the special effects available at the time to produce visually the components of action and plot:

> O, for a muse of fire that would ascend
> The brightest heaven of invention!
> A kingdom for a stage, princes to act,
> And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!
> Then should the warlike Harry, like himself,
> Assume the port of Mars, and at his heels,
> Leashed in like hounds should famine, sword, and fire
> Crouch for employment. (I.Chor.1-9)[12]

Recognising the limitations of the stage,[13] Shakespeare establishes Henry as the hero of this epic play before we even see him on stage; he is a formidable warrior, likened to the Roman God of War, who has the strength and ability to combat and conquer those in his path. *Henry V* begins *in media res* in the sense that the history that precedes the play, as well as the future history of the War of the Roses, was not only well known to the Tudor-era audience, but had also been clearly depicted by Shakespeare. Of the eight plays in this cycle, *Henry V* was the final one composed; the play at once serves as the completion of the eight plays and the load-bearing keystone of the chronological archway of historical events already dramatized on the Elizabethan stage.

[12] For this study, I use the Oxford World's Classic edition, edited by Gary Taylor. Citations of acts are in upper-case Roman numbers, citations of scenes are in lower-case Roman numbers and citations of line numbers are in Arabic numbers.

[13] While Shakespeare's text apologises profusely for these limitations, Gary Taylor reminds us that "in the theatre, one apologizes only for one's most reliable effects, while expressing the greatest possible confidence about anything wobbly" (56).

Despite its place in the narrative timeline, it stands apart as completing an epic cycle and serving as a self-contained work in epic style individually. The Chorus's teleological rhetoric reminds the audience of the coming of Agincourt (14), and his provocative tone instigates fervour from the outset, as the "two mighty monarchies, / Whose high upreared and abutting fronts / The perilous narrow ocean parts asunder" (20-22). The Chorus instantly informs the audience that this will be a play of mighty battles that will feed into the imagery of "warlike Harry" and the great English venture to pursue his ancestral claims in France. Just as the epic poems of fame, the Chorus even warns the theatre-goers that his narration will take them to different lands and that the timing of the events will be condensed to fit a stage production, thus breaking with the unities of time and place (29-31).

La Numancia likewise opens *in media res* with war being the emphasis. Cervantes does not have a narrator character introduce the action, like the Chorus, but Cipión's lines that open the play clearly announce to the audience details of the situation, and the direct response from Jugurta, nephew to the King of Numidia and ally of Rome, relays the reverence that people had for him:

> CIPIÓN: Esta difícil y pesada carga
> que el Senado romano me ha encargado
> tanto me aprieta, me fatiga y carga
> que ya sale de quicio mi cuidado.
> Guerra de curso tan extraño y larga,
> y que tantos romanos ha costado
> ¿quién no estará suspenso al acabarla
> o quién no temerá de renovarla? (ll. 1-8)[14]
>
> JUGURTA: ¿Quién, Cipión? Quien tiene la ventura
> y el valor nunca visto que en ti encierras,
> pues con ella y con él está sigura
> la victoria y el triunfo destas guerras. (ll. 9-12)

The legendary Roman general proceeds to frame the narrative in dialogue by explaining that the war which had lasted sixteen years to that point (although historically, it was more like twenty) and which had seen countless defeats and casualties in the field of battle against a numerically inferior enemy will not continue. His "valor nunca visto" creates the image of the saviour general whose leadership going forward will sever his army from historical failures and whose prudent guidance going forward will ensure victory.

The state of the Roman army when Cipión arrives is deplorable, and he expresses his disgust in a long address to his officers and his soldiers (ll. 65-168), appealing to their patriotism and sense of national pride:

> Avergüénceos, varones esforzados,
> ver que, a nuestro pesar, con arrogancia,
> tan pocos españoles, y encerrados,
> defiendan este nido de Numancia.
> Diez y seis años son, y más, pasados,
> que mantienen la guerra y la jactancia
> de haber vencido con feroces manos

[14] For this study, I use the Cátedra edition, edited by Robert Marrast. Citations are of line numbers only, which are continuous throughout the play.

millares de millares de romanos.
Vosotros os vencéis; que estáis vencidos
del bajo antojo femenil liviano,
con Venus y con Baco entretenidos,
sin que a las armas extendáis la mano.
Correos agora, si no estáis corridos,
de ver que este pequeño pueblo hispano
contra el poder romano se defienda,
y cuando más rendido, más ofenda. (l. 113-128)

This harangue, which results in the restoration of discipline in the forces and the decision to wear the enemy down with a siege appears to contain prudent military tactics. He expels prostitutes and all the merchants hanging around looking to make money off the lazy, undisciplined soldiers worn down by the banalities of a stagnant war. Over the course of the dialogue, the army recognises the error of its ways, obeys the consul and completes the construction of a massive ditch and complex of forts connected by thick walls to keep the enemy in. All in the name of saving Roman blood and encouraging surrender.

At this point in the play, Cipión, a revered military leader, could be seen as establishing his credentials as the epic hero, but these lines instead depict him as an epic anti-hero. He openly identifies the enemy as "españoles" (l. 115) and asserts that no man shall indulge in women or in luxurious perfumes as long as there are Spaniards alive in Numancia (l. 144), as they are "rebeldes bárbaros hispanos" (164). Although Cipión's strong leadership and patriotic zeal might appeal to Spaniards of the late sixteenth century, and although Spain of the Habsburg monarchs Charles V (1519-1558; King Charles I of Spain (1516-1556)) and Philip II considered themselves to be the heirs to the Ancient Roman Empire, Cervantes's character clearly declares himself to be the foreign invader whose desire is absolute conquest of *españoles*.

This revelation made in conjunction with mounting a siege of the city, whose inhabitants of men, women and children are vastly outnumbered by the well-oiled Roman military machine, and the Roman leader's supreme confidence in his decision, naturally sways the audience's favour in the direction of beleaguered Numantians. Epic teleology materialises as Act I ends with the appearance of the allegorical figures of España and Duero externalising the plight of the invaded. España laments the pain and suffering of her people, while the River Duero, which flows alongside the Celtiberian stronghold, reassures his counterpart that her future history will be much brighter than the darkness seeping over the city walls. The conflict thus establishes the collective whole of Numancia as epic hero, with the struggles they will face in fulfilling their destiny.[15] However, it is worth noting that the Spain of the Catholic Monarchs, Charles V and "el Segundo Filipo, sin Segundo" (l. 512) will be the invaders some 1700 years later. *They* will be the aggressors at the head of an expanding Spanish Empire that will strike fear in the hearts of those who oppose them; in essence, the Spain of Philip II, who had just controversially invaded Portugal, a fellow Catholic country, and assumed that country's crown, bears a striking resemblance to Cervantes's Roman general. Cipión's reputation as a "general prudente" (l. 1153) is very reminiscent of Philip II's moniker of *rey prudente*.

As the audience and reader of Cervantes's *Numancia* begin to recognise the theme of justice in warfare, vital for the moral success of a military campaign and at the heart of epic literature, so too does Shakespeare venture into the discussion, albeit more subtly. The same

[15] See Kahn (2008), pp. 181-186 for an analysis of these speeches and the interpretations of them as being proponents of Spanish imperialism and serving as negative criticism of Philip II's Government.

concept of warfare, particularly in the form of an invasion of another sovereign country, needing a strong moral base arises in Act I. One aspect often overlooked in the study of *Henry V* comes in the very first scene of the play. The Bishops of Ely and Canterbury discuss justifying Henry's claim to the French throne, and thus legitimising his enterprise to France. Their motives, however, are dubious, as their intention appears to be to permit warfare as a means of distracting the nation from a parliamentary bill that would threaten Church revenues. In this "wag the dog" scenario, we see that the moral justification of the entire invasion is predicated on the word of two bishops who openly tell the audience of their intention to persuade the king to fight, simply for their own financial gain. This leads into their explanation of the invalidity of Sallic Law in France and, in turn, what all the characters consider to be Henry's true claim. Does this lead us to doubt the justice of the invasion with partial blame for any moral compromise placed on the scheming of the clergy?

Henry deems it imperative to have God's approval for this military operation, thinking not only of his own soul, but also of those of his subjects. Shakespeare presents his title character, "the mirror of all Christian kings" (II.Chor.6), as a man of honour and scruples. The bishops declare Henry's claim to France as being valid, giving him the justification he seeks, but does he commence his quest with a clean conscience? The English faithful flock to their king's banner assuming that this is a just invasion.

Henry's authority is immediately challenged by the ill-fated Cambridge, Scroop and Grey, and just as Cipión has done, he must establish control, even if he must resort to cruelty to do so. However, authority and power do not inherently form part of moral military action. He threatens the citizens of Harfleur with rape, murder and destruction if they do not surrender (III.iii.81-123), and although capitulation means these actions do not come to fruition, we can only assume that Henry would have followed through on these threats. Fearful that the sinful acts of others within his army could jeopardise the mission, he has his old pub-mate Bardolph executed for stealing from a church.[16] And as the Battle of Agincourt is winding down, he orders the execution of all the French prisoners. Roe maintains that it "calls his humanity into question", even though "Machiavelli of course would have had no difficulty in endorsing Henry's swift, decisive action" (2002, 63). Roe briefly discusses the conflicting scholarly responses to Henry's actions regarding the execution of prisoners, but from the perspective of creating a royal epic hero, these are the trials that the king must endure for the overall advancement of his nation. But do these actions help justify the invasion?[17]

Cipión's status as the epic anti-hero manifests itself in part in the image of the Machiavellian Prince conquering new lands, and the most effective way to win and maintain order is to be harsh. Here he needs to demonstrate cruelty and assert his authority.[18] When Numantian ambassadors seek a peace accord that would recognize Roman authority while still maintaining a semblance of their previous lives, the general flatly refuses and will only accept absolute capitulation. He states "Cada cual se fabrica su destino, / no tiene allí fortuna alguna parte" (ll. 157-58). Humans create their own fortune, and would be wise not to rely on divine

[16] In Shakespeare's play, the execution takes place off stage. In Kenneth Branagh's 1989 film *Henry V*, not only does the audience witness the act, but the entire English army marches by his hanging body, as if to show them what happens to those who might jeopardise the justice of Henry's quest.

[17] "[…] a prince must want to have a reputation for compassion rather than for cruelty; none the less, he must be careful that he does not make bad use of compassion" (Machiavelli ???? 53). This study is not the forum for a more lengthy discussion on the topic of Shakespeare, *Henry V* and Machiavellian thought. For more on this, see Chaudhrui (1995), Clegg (2003), D'Amico (1986), Herbel (2015) and Roe (2002).

[18] Academic studies of the influence of Machiavellian thought in Spanish society and literature of this time is nowhere near as extensive as in Shakespearean studies. It is widely accepted that Cervantes and his contemporaries were well aware of Machiavelli's writings and the polemics it produced, even though they were prohibited in Spain. Some works that address this are Bleznick (1958), Cascardi (2012), Cervantes, Fernando (2005) and Guerrero (2013); none of these studies focus exclusively on *La Numancia*.

intervention in order to achieve his goals; this sentiment does coincide with the Machiavellian concept of *Fortuna*, which refers to the "consequences of the activity of men rather than to a natural phenomenon" (Balaban 1990, 21), but it goes expressly against the heroic code and a fall is then inevitable. Here we see Cipión enacting these very ideals, but he ignores the power of fortune and destiny at his peril. Cipión even receives a warning from one of his subordinates to proceed with caution:

> No dudo yo, señor, sino que importa
> regir con duro freno la milicia,
> y que se dé al soldado rienda corta
> cuando él se precipita en la injusticia.
> La fuerza del ejército se acorta
> cuando va sin arrimo de justicia,
> aunque más le acompañen a montones
> mil pintadas banderas y escuadrones. (ll. 57-64)

These words spoken by Jugurta could be considered an aside, as there is no response whatsoever from the Roman general. Historically, Jugurta, or Jugurtha, became an enemy of Rome in the decades following Numancia, and he was only defeated after being betrayed by an ally. Much like the Numantians, Jugurtha was never defeated on the field of battle.[19] Tar identifies Cipión's siege of the city as his *hamartia*, ultimately leading to his moral failure, but she warns against the moral applications of this concept. She identifies a double *hamartia*, not exonerating the Numantians from an error in judgement, namely that they waited too long to negotiate peace, and posits that "the errors emphasize, not a moral side effect, but rather the complicity of practical lived experience and the mutability of the human situation" (2004, 56). I maintain that the dominance of the *im*mutable force of destiny has been established in this play, and Cipión's attempts to ignore its strength, and the justice of his decision, is his ultimate error. He denies the Numantians the chance to either fight or end the war with a peaceful compromise; his claim that he will starve them to death and not allow them to fight is just as oppressive as military domination.

While Cipión displays supreme confidence in his decree, which ultimately disregards the potential suffering of the Numantians, the remaining three acts of the play focus on the very humanity of the besieged people. Act Two takes place entirely within the city walls. Act Three begins with a brief exchange of words between Roman and Numantian characters, but then the rest of the act also takes place in the city. The fourth and final act, which portrays the final destruction of the city and the horrors of disease, starvation, cannibalism, murder and mass suicide, only sees Cipión and his followers at the end as they lament the fact that they will have no prisoners or booty to take back to Rome; this latter fact precluded an official triumph being awarded to Cipión and further glory.

Meanwhile, Henry parts for France, assured of his "fair and lucky war" (II.ii.181), putting his "puissance into the hand of God" (187). He credits God with revealing the plot against his life and crosses the Channel. The King of France, Charles VI, not only fears Henry's strength, but also the fact that his destiny is to become France's king (II.iv.62-64). This appears to be in process when Henry's siege of Harfleur ends in surrender, although the Dauphin still holds steadfast in his arrogance, assured that his forces are superior to the young pretender whom he mocked in Act I with the gift of the tennis balls.

[19] The principal source for Jugurtha is *The Jugurthine War* by Sallust (86-34 BC), a work translated into Spanish in 1554, so available to Cervantes. See also Kahn (2007) for a thorough discussion of Cervantes's dramatization of the historical character in *La Numancia*.

As the English army progresses through France and they come to the field of Agincourt, Henry's character privately changes: "I and my bosom must debate awhile" (IV.i.32). He begins to question the morality of his incursion into France, with the lives of so many men weighing on his conscience and lays bare his preoccupation with the justice of his enterprise. As he wanders through his camp on the eve of battle, disguised in Erpingham's cloak, he engages his soldiers in discussion about this very topic; he learns that those who follow him do so out of obedience. Although Bates declares that "our obedience to the King wipes the crime of it / out of us" (127-128), the quarrel with Williams exposes a conflicting message. Henry asserts that "the King is not bound to answer for the particular endings of his soldiers, the father of his son, nor the master of his servant, for they purpose not their deaths when they propose their services" (148-152). He reminds them of their free will: "Every subject's duty is the Kings, but every subject's soul is his own" (168-170), and as such each person is required to engage in battle with a clean conscience.

However, ambiguity in Henry's own conscience arises once again when he is alone with his thoughts. He is still uncertain of his destiny and if the divine is on his side. As dawn approaches, and with it certain battle, Henry's thoughts turn to the sin that could still be tarnishing his soul:

> Not today, O Lord,
> O not today, think not upon the fault
> My father made in compassing the crown.
> I Richard's body have interred new,
> And on it have bestowed more contrite tears
> Than from it issued forced drops of blood.
> Five hundred poor have I in yearly pay
> Who twice a day their withered hands hold up
> Toward heaven to pardon blood. And I have built
> Two chantries, where the sad and solemn priests
> Sing still for Richard's soul. More will I do,
> Though all that I can do is nothing worth,
> Since that my penitence comes after ill,
> Imploring pardon. (280-293)

These are not the thoughts of a leader confident in the just cause of his invasion of another realm. These are not the words of a king assured of the righteousness of his sovereignty. Going to the expense of paying 500 people to pray twice daily over the remains of a former king, reinterred in newly built sacred chanceries, with two priests whose sole duty is to sing for the soul of Richard II, while still aiming to do more, shows that Henry will go to great lengths not to compromise his own crown, and ultimately his own soul. These are contemplations of uncertainty as the King of England ponders his own mortality and whether or not he will have to face God responsible for the deaths of all those who followed him to France seeking glory.

Henry and England are ultimately victorious at Agincourt, due in part to the hubris of the French side, who, realising that their "threescore thousand men" (IV.iii.3) outnumber the English five to one, severely underestimate the enemy and their prowess with the long bow; although, curiously, this decisive weapon in the historical victory gets no mention in this dramatized version. Despite the success and the fanfare described by the Chorus in his opening lines to the fifth and final act, we must ask what the lasting impressions are on the audience. Are they that of a hero king, or are they that of the decades of bloody civil strife to come under the reign of his son, Henry VI, "Which oft our stage hath shown" (Epil.13)? Are these feelings of fleeting happiness, with the celebration of victory when the audience knows what is to come?

We are reminded of the claims of the French king, referred to above, that Henry V's destiny was to inherit his crown; however, his premonitions are incorrect and this never occurs.

It is at the closing points of these plays where we see that the central characters' status as epic hero or anti-hero follows the path laid down by the immutable force of destiny. Even in sixteenth-century Spain and England, belief in the power of one's destiny, normally associated with God's established but unrevealed plan for each person, abounded. Ancient epics relied on the Gods to guide heroes and interfere with human events, either for the protection of the epic hero or to precipitate his downfall; in Christian European literature and drama, we find a syncretism of old and new as fate and destiny are assumed by God. Did God create people with free will, and in enacting that free will does God set people up for moral failure? When people do immoral things, is this destined to happen? In epic poems, heroes are informed of their fate, and any attempts to counteract it in order to achieve another destiny of their choosing will result in a moral fall from grace, a fall that fate, or God, had already decreed. By following the heroic code and the dictates of destiny, even if the result is death of the epic hero, a moral victory is achieved. Either way, he must perish, and this destruction, no matter how tragic it might seem, is morally justified.

In *Henry V* and *Numancia* our central characters are afflicted by a tragic flaw, an aspect of their natural condition that makes them imperfect and that will contribute to their seemingly premature downfall; this is associated with *hamartia*. Scholars do not typically associate *Henry V* with the genre of tragedy, particularly with its celebratory tone, but as the Chorus so plainly tells the audience in the epilogue, Henry V died very young; his death then precipitated the decades of bloodshed between the Houses of York and the Lancaster. His demise is necessary for the advent of the Tudor dynasty via two different courses of action: 1) Henry's death paves the way for the eventually shambolic reign of his son, Henry VI, his deposition by Edward IV, the murder of Edward V and his younger brother in the Tower, and, thus, the Machiavellian (according to Shakespeare) yet brief rule of Richard III. Henry Tudor then sweeps in to save England; and 2) if Henry V had not died young, then there likely would not have been a Tudor royal dynasty in existence to claim the throne. Henry VII was descended from Owen Tudor and Henry V's widow, Catherine of Valois. If Henry V had lived longer, the Tudors would likely have remained a minor Welsh noble family on the geographic and political periphery. There would have been no Jasper Tudor to marry Margaret Beaufort, whose direct ancestry to Edward III gave her son aspirations to the throne.

Henry V's tragic flaw does not stem from his past behaviour as a young man in the taverns; rather, his downfall is precipitated by actions beyond his control and beyond his attempts to rehabilitate his own image. He has inherited sin. The House of Lancaster assumed the throne after the deposition and subsequent death of God's anointed monarch, Richard II. The sin of the monarch then pervades the morality of his people, who are destined to fall as well. In the case of the England of Henry V, he was victorious at Agincourt, he reached the peace accord, he married his queen and secured himself and his heirs as the rightful successors of the French throne. He restores his possessions with the hopes of establishing a lasting peace in both kingdoms under Lancastrian overlordship. However, other forces of destiny are at play that reinforce the issue: Henry's invasion of France might not have been morally and divinely sanctioned after all.

The power of destiny and divine fate might lead him to victory on the field of battle, but they also ensure that he must suffer a premature death; Aeneas's mother, Venus, receives word from Jupiter that although her son will reach Italy, wage war and establish the civilization that will evolve into the great Roman Empire, he will only live three years as king himself:

> [...] Your son
> (I now speak out – I know this anxiousness
> is gnawing at you; I unroll the secret
> scroll of the Fates, awake its distant pages)
> shall wage tremendous war in Italy
> and crush ferocious nations and establish
> a way of life and walls for his own people –
> the King of Latium, until he has passed
> three winters since he overcame the Latins. (Virgil 1981, I.363-72)

In the *Iliad*, Achilles's mother, Thetis, tells her son that his choices in response to Agamemnon's call to battle are to fight the Trojans and die young, but live in eternal memory, or avoid war, live a long life and be forgotten. He appears to choose, but in actuality he fulfils his destiny. In Shakespeare's play, the final scene of action concludes with Henry, tranquil in the peace he has achieved and the promise of a new nation and a betrothal, looks forward to a prosperous future of collaboration. However, the Chorus then reappears to deliver his ominous sonnet to in concluding the play:

> Thus far with rough and all-unable pen
> Our bending author hath pursued the story,
> In little room confining mighty men,
> Mangling by starts the full course of their glory.
> Small time, but that small most greatly lived
> This star of England. Fortune made his sword,
> By which the world's best garden he achieved
> And of it left his son imperial lord.
> Henry the Sixth, in infant bands crowned King
> Of France and England, did this king succeed,
> Whose state so many had the managing
> That they lost France and made his England bleed,
> Which oft our stage hath shown. And for their sake,
> In your fair minds let this acceptance take. (Epil.1-14)

Just as Aeneas represented Roman values and ideals after fleeing his destroyed homeland, so too does Henry V exemplify the chivalric monarch that all English monarchs should aim to imitate. In order for Augustus to exist as Roman Emperor, Aeneas must perish; likewise, the Tudor dynasty in England with the Virgin Queen on the throne could only come to fruition with the death of the warrior king and by extension the House of Lancaster. The deaths of Henry V and his son Henry VI prove necessary in order to sever the crown from the flawed Lancastrian line, no matter how unwittingly these two Henrys inherited sin.

In *La Numancia*, the characters of España and Duero inform the audience through their dialogue that the Numantians will not survive, but the besieged people, still unaware of how their story ends, hold out hope. In Act Two, Cervantes includes a supernatural element, similar to scenes in the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid* when Odysseus and Aeneas respectively venture into the underworld to seek the sage advice of those who have left the mortal world. A Numantian priest resurrects a compatriot from the grave in order to ascertain what precisely the future holds for their people. Teógenes, the city's *de facto* leader, opens the act bemoaning "los tristes signos y contrario hados" (l. 539) which have the Numantians hopelessly enclosed by way of the Romans' "cobardes mañas" (l. 541). However, it is not until El Cuerpo, who expresses

great anger at being brought to life after suffering the misery of death, is reanimated that destiny's plan for the "lamentable fin" (l. 1069) is revealed:

> la cual acabará a las mismas manos
> de los que son a ella más cercanos.
> No llevarán romanos la victoria
> de la fuerte Numancia, ni ella menos
> tendrá del enemigo triunfo o gloria,
> amigos y enemigos siendo buenos;
> no entiendas que de paz habrá memoria,
> que rabia alberga en sus contrarios senos:
> el amigo cuchillo, el homicida
> de Numancia será, y será su vida. (ll. 1071-1080)

Here we see the entire population of Numancia take on the role as a collective epic hero to counteract Cipión's antagonism. Not only do the Numantians receive confirmation that they will die, and die by their own hands, but they also have assurances that they can still thwart a Roman victory if they follow fate's commands. And not only will the Romans leave Spain with nothing, but that by making the ultimate sacrifice, even in ending their own lives before they can be captured and enslaved by the enemy, the Numantians will guarantee themselves immortality through national memory. They follow the heroic code that Cipión ignores.

Curiously, two young Numantian men, Leoncio and Marandro, whose friendship, along with Marandro's romance with Lira, forms a secondary plot in the play, are on one side of the stage watching the supernatural spectacle. Marandro takes at face value the prophesy of destruction that he has just witnessed, whereas his friend dismiss it:

> Que todas son ilusiones,
> quimeras y fantasías,
> agüeros y hechicerías,
> diabólicas invenciones.
> No muestres que tienes poca
> ciencia en creer desconciertos;
> que poco cuidan los muertos
> de lo que a los vivos toca. (ll. 1097-1104)

While such a reliance on the words of a dead man, even the belief that the dead man rose and spoke, would appear to the Spanish audience of the 1580s as superstition at best and the devil's work at worst, in the context of these pre-Christian, pagan people, and in the context of a dramatic spectacle structured on epic poetry, the omens and fate written in the stars do not bode well for the Numantians. Commenting on this scene, Sofie Kluge (2019) states that "Leoncio thus tears down the illusory but suggestive tragic vision conjured by the Numantian necromancer-historical dramatist. Tragic spectacles—even when based on historical facts and historical persons—are but 'ilusiones', 'quimeras' and 'fantasías'" (239-240), and that the reactions of Leoncio and Marandro anticipate the perspective of the audience watching the play (240). However, as we then learn in Acts III and IV, when the siege has worn them down and the allegorical figures of Hambre, Enfermedad and Guerra narrate the miserable end of Numancia, the young Numantians were wrong to doubt the divination. This resurrected Numantian must have attained knowledge of the future from the fates themselves because he was indeed accurate in his foretelling of the end of their people in this physical existence. He relays to them their immutable fate that had already been set in motion.

Throughout the play, the moral foundations of Cipión's siege become more and more unsteady. Most prominent in the final two acts of the play is not the imperial glory of an invading power, but rather the stark human consequences of siege warfare. After Cipión denies the enemy a "singular batalla" (l. 1160), a duel between each side's champion with the winner determining the victor of the war, the Numantian men propose a suicidal raid of the Roman camp so that they can die in battle with honour; however, pleas by the Numantian women temper their rage.[20] They remind the men that leaving the women, the children, the elderly and infirmed will only leave them susceptible to the horrors of slavery or death. The romance between Lira and Marandro, who vows to marry his true love when the war is over, succumbs to the reality of the situation, and the materialisation of their union disappears after being within grasp. Their loss of innocence then gives way to an unnamed mother whose infant child has died in her arms because she is too hungry and dehydrated to produce milk for him. She cannot perform the basic task of feeding her baby.

The endings of the *Numancia* and *Henry V* appear to contrast each other, with the former witnessing the destruction of those with whom the audience is meant to sympathise at the hands of a much stronger military power, and the latter celebrating the improbable victory of an outnumbered army who had invaded the country's ancient enemy.[21] However, the finales have produced conflicting interpretations that cause us to return to the question of why Shakespeare and Cervantes would create any ambiguity in characters and plots and how this fits into the epic, and counter-epic, readings of the plays. Considering the events occurring at the time of writing and performing, we can see how the action of the plays reflect the societies in which they were created.

In England of the late 1590s, the representation on stage of the legendary English king in his most famous battle served as a point of reflection on the monarch contemporary to the audience. Elizabeth I's reign had surpassed the forty-year mark prior to Shakespeare writing this play in 1599, meaning that for most people, including the playwright, an England without the Virgin Queen on the throne was beyond living memory. While she must have produced an aura of immortality amongst the common people, privately, if not publicly, the contemplation of her demise and the fact that she had never produced an heir must have caused some angst. In the *Henriad*, and in particular *Henry V*, tapping into the legend of this warrior king fulfils multiple purposes: 1) exploiting a well-known historical figure to arouse patriotic fervour in the audience, 2) further legitimizing the Tudor dynasty in a moment of uncertainty, and 3)

[20] When Scipio Aemilianus served in Spain in 151 BC, eighteen years before the fall of Numancia, the historical record indicates that he accepted such a proposal and won as Rome defeated the strong Iberian city of Intercatia (Kahn 2008, p 162). There is no mention of such a proposal in reference to the Numantine War; nor is there reference to this ancient tactic used to end a stagnant war in Shakespeare's *Henry V*. However, ironically, in the Netflix film *The King* (2019), which adapts Shakespeare's telling of the rise of Henry V to power and his victories in France, Timothée Chalamet's Henry challenges the French Dauphin, played by Robert Pattinson, to a duel for victory in the war to avoid any further deaths. The Dauphin declines and the Battle of Agincourt ensues. As the battle draws to a close, the Dauphin, whose pristinely clean armour indicates that he had not taken part in the battle, approaches a Henry exhausted and muddied to engage in the duel. The Dauphin slips in the mud and cannot regain his balance; with a simple nod of the king's head, four of his men violently kill the French prince. Historically, the Dauphin Louis was not present at Agincourt and died, likely of dysentery, less than two months later.

[21] There are conflicting numbers in the historical record of how many Roman soldiers besieged Numancia and how many Numantians defended their city. The consensus, though, was that Rome outnumbered Numancia by as much as ten to one. In Act III of the play, Lira asks "¿qué harán / tres mil contra ochenta mil?" (ll. 1393-1394). Likewise, at Agincourt the historical record agrees that the French vastly outnumbered the beleaguered English army, suffering from disease, starvation, fatigue and a general lack of enthusiasm. In fact, Henry's army was marching towards Calais to return to England when confronted by the French. In the play, the only numbers refer to the casualties after the battle: 10,000 French dead (IV.viii.78ff) against only 28 English dead (101-104). This information comes directly from Holinshed, who also says that other sources cite up to 500 or 600 English casualties (see Taylor 2008, p. 308).

emphasising the complete awareness that the Tudor line, like that of the Lancasters and Yorks in Shakespeare's plays, would become extinct with Elizabeth's death. Could this also reflect the tension and uncertainty of what fate had in store for England as it entered a new century?

Approximately a decade and a half earlier, when Cervantes is composing *La Numancia*, we find the writer living in time period of prolific production of epic poems; more than 200 were published in Spain in the sixteenth century. In the Duero speech that closes Act I, Cervantes makes clear reference to the highly controversial annexation of Portugal of 1580, along with the military campaigns of the Duke of Alba in the Netherlands in the 1560s and 1570s. The Duke's armies fought with such ferocity that he was stuck with the unenviable moniker of the Butcher of Flanders; yet Cervantes omits the great military successes of the Battle of Lepanto (1571), in which he fought and received life-altering injuries, and the capture of Tunis in 1573, to go along with the Spanish holding of La Goleta, which Charles V had conquered in 1534.[22] In the aftermath of these great victories, one could imagine that Spaniards felt that they were living in epic times. Murrin states that "the poets of naval battles, especially those who wrote about Lepanto, introduced a new hero to epic narrative: the commanding officer" (1994, 179). Juan Rufo's epic poem *La Austriada* (1584) has the Christian leader of Lepanto, Don Juan de Austria, who also died prematurely in 1578 at the age of 31, as the epic hero; Cervantes even wrote one of the introductory sonnets published in this work and it is included as one of three epic poems saved from the flames during the liquidation of Don Quixote's library (I.6).

However, celebrating the decisive victory also served as a reminder that the euphoria of Lepanto was a distant memory, Tunis and La Goleta had been overrun by the Ottoman Empire, and although Cervantes had been ransomed in 1580 after five years of enslavement in Algiers, there were still up to 20,000 Christians in bondage in Northern Africa; this at a time when Philip II's invasion of Portugal, his crackdown in the Netherlands and his obsession with regaining England for Catholicism diverted his attention away from the plight of those captives still yearning for rescue.[23] Philip was highly criticised for his pursuit of the Portuguese crown and the non-aggression treaty he signed with the Ottoman-backed forces in North Africa, which very well could have precipitated his lack of support for his nephew's invasion of Morroco. On August 4, 1578, the young King Sebastian I of Portugal died at the Battle of Alcácer Quibir after his uncle had dissuaded him from undertaking the enterprise.

At the end of Act IV, when Cipión realises that his chances for a triumph in Rome are slipping through his fingers, he learns that one Numantian remains alive. The young boy, Bariato, has hidden in a tower to escape the carnage, but his patriotic pride prevents him from succumbing to the Cipión's pleas for surrender; instead, he hurls himself to his own demise so that the sacrifice of his compatriots has not been carried out in vain.[24] The Roman general then reacts with awe towards the boy's bravery:

> ¡Oh nunca vista, memorable hazaña!
> ¡Niño de anciano y valeroso pecho,
> que no sólo a Numancia, mas a España

[22] One of the plays that Cervantes composed in this initial period of his writing career was called *La batalla naval*, which most probably depicted Lepanto. Unfortunately, all that is left of the play is the title itself.

[23] A Cervantine play from this era that does survive is *Los tratos de Argel*, depicting Christian enslavement in Algiers. See Fernández (2000) for a study of this play as a call to Philip II to take up arms and liberate those captives.

[24] See Kahn (2007) for an analysis of the character of Bariato in conjunction with the historical figure of Viriatus (d. 139 BC), the legendary hero of Lusitania, in modern-day Portugal, who fought for independence of his homeland against Rome in the years before the final demise of Numancia. Like Jugurtha of Numidia, Viriatus was assasinated by the Romans thanks to the treachery of his men, and like Numanica, never defeated on the field of battle.

has adquerido gloria en este hecho!
¡Con tu viva virtud y heroica, estraña,
queda muerto y perdido mi derecho!
¡Tú con esta caída levantaste
tu fama, y mis victorias derribaste!
Que fuera aún viva y en su ser Numancia,
sólo porque vivieras, me holgara,
que tú solo has llevado la ganancia
desta larga contienda, ilustre y rara.
¡Lleva, pues, niño, lleva la jactancia
y la gloria que el cielo te prepara,
por haber, derribándote, vencido
al que, subiendo, queda más caído! (ll. 2401-2416)

These two *octavas*, Cipión's final lines of the play, perhaps best represent the moral downfall of the central antagonist as he comes to the realisation of his defeat. *La Numancia* comes to a close with a Chorus-like figure, the allegorical incarnation Fama, whose final words attempt to calm the audience and ensure them that by cutting short their own lives the Numantians have ensured their immortality:

Hallo sola en Numancia todo cuanto
debe con justo título cantarse,
y lo que puede dar materia al canto
para poder mil siglos ocuparse:
la fuerza no vencida, el valor tanto,
dino de en prosa y verso celebrarse;
mas, pues de esto se encarga mi memoria,
dése feliz remate a nuestra historia. (ll. 2441-2448)

Fama claims that this story has a happy ending, as we should celebrate the "fuerza no vencida" of those who are the forefathers of the Spanish imperial superpower. But the Numantians must also perish. They are a pre-Christian, Celtiberian people whom Spaniards of Cervantes's day considered to be their forefathers. They fit perfectly into the Dantean concept of the virtuous pagan, housed in the first circle of Hell. Virtuous pagans represent the best of humanity and include Old Testament prophets, ancient philosophers and those whose lives are exemplary. But they never enjoyed the Word of Christ, nor were they baptised, so no matter how much we should exalt their virtue, they still remain in Hell, or at best in Purgatory.[25] Sixteenth-century Hapsburg Spain, champion of Tridentine Catholic orthodoxy and sworn enemy of heretics and infidels had, by many perspectives, reached a zenith in the 1580s, when Cervantes was writing *La Numancia*, but the cracks in the veneer of empire were already forming.

Epics are complete tales in and of themselves, but they serve as a midway point or a sort of halfway house for national history. The epic story is a necessary stopping point in the development of the civilization in question, which, for better or for worse, cannot come to fruition without the action of the epic; and perhaps more importantly, without the completion of the epic and the demise of the epic hero, often identified as a predecessor or ancestor of the ruling faction at the time of the poem's composition, said ruler cannot rule. The empire cannot rule with *imperium* without the sacrifice of previous ages. The epic poem is at once a

[25] See Cervantes, Fernando (2005) for more on Cervantes and Dante, particularly with reference to virtuous pagans, although there is no reference in this article to *La Numancia* (pp. 331-333).

glorification of the past and a commemoration of compatriots whose lives were sacrificed for the greatest cause of all. Shakespeare's Chorus provides us with the post-climactic narration in the Epilogue, which at once finalises the dramatic version of Henry's life and times and serves as a transition to the second tetralogy. Shakespeare chooses not to depict the death of Henry V on stage, rather the closing lines in the Epilogue inform the audience of what they already knew. In Shakespeare's own words, written years earlier and uttered by the Duke of Bedford at Henry V's funeral in the opening scene of *Henry VI, Part I*, Henry V was "too famous to live long" (I.i.6). Already upon news of his death, the French have begun to reclaim territory that Henry V fought so hard to control but would inevitably lose.

Although both stories were well-known, the playwrights emphasised that the deaths of their characters were destined to occur. In the case of Henry V, the early death of the king was portrayed by Holinshed as sad, but just: "Thus ended this puissant prince his most noble and fortunate reign, whose life (saith Hall) though cruel Atropos abbreviated, yet neither fire, malice, nor fretting time shall appall his honor or blot out the glory of him that in so small time had done so many and royal acts" (1587, 584). Atropos, the Greek fate responsible for cutting the proverbial thread of life, determined the length of people's lives, and Henry's was necessarily short. In *La Numancia*, Cipión's moral downfall results from his attempt to create his own fate and to engage in unjust warfare; although fate and destiny are referred to as cruel multiple times, the Numantians live eternally in people's memory for ultimately accepting their fate. Both plays' characters must die so that the natural order of things continues.

Conclusion

William Shakespeare and Miguel de Cervantes lived, wrote and died in the exact same period of history, an era in which their respective countries were forging a national identity and engaging in empire. Spain's empire had spanned the globe when Cervantes wrote *La Numancia*, but the tone and sentiment coming out of the play question if that empire had already reached its climax. Cervantes's two other surviving plays from this period have been interpreted as being negatively critical of Spanish policies, and the unclear fashioning of the righteous Numantian defence against unjust invasion stands out. In her study on Cervantes and warfare, Triplette reminds us that the Spaniard has form in undermining the implementation of military fighting and that "in his later texts, the subversive undertones of his representation of the institution of warfare becomes even more pronounced" (2021, 25). When *Henry V* hits the stage, England is in the infancy of its expansion, but continual successes against Spain and other enemies in battle and via piracy emboldened the tiny island nation to look outwards. They had already established a foothold in North America, and in 1600, the year following the play's debut, the East India Company was formed in London, setting in motion the transfer of the title of the empire on which the sun never sets from Hispania to Britannia.

These were times of great transition, politically and in the theatre, and there are numerous examples of fractures in society presenting themselves in literary inventions. Cervantes's failed attempt to contribute to the creation of a Spanish national drama and Shakespeare's innovations of the history play genre bring to light the form and convention of the epic and the counter-epic; the combination of the heroic and the tragic comprise the "hallmark of the anti-epic genre" (Simerka 1998, 60). Societies in both England and Spain were far from uniform in their perspectives of their countries' past and present

In following much of the form, convention and plotline of an epic poem, yet with multiple interpretations, we must come to the conclusion that such ambiguity was intentional. Cervantes could have written *La Numancia* without the questionable references to the Duke of Alba and to the Portuguese succession, and replaced them with Spain's mighty victories against the Ottomans. But instead, there is no mention of Lepanto, for example, a battle in which Cervantes participated and received life-altering injuries, resulting in the loss of use of his left

arm. Instead, he created Cipión as an epic anti-hero whose military techniques, both Stoic and Machiavellian in nature, ultimately violate the dictates of fate. While he firmly believes that each man makes his own destiny, his denial of fate's control over human events and his insistence on enacting unjust means to achieve the end of a Roman military victory unwittingly sets in motions events that lead to his moral downfall and focussed on the collective suffering of the physically weak but morally strong victims of imperial invasion. Historically, there were conflicting sentiments about Scipio Aemilianus, viewing him:

> as a prudent leader and harsh military man, a generous patriot and a greedy and arrogant self-promoter, a respected adversary and a cruel conqueror, a victorious and triumphant commander and a tragic character suffering a moral downfall. In the play, Cipión serves as a microcosm of imperial expansion. He commands respect as a military man who genuinely seems to think that what he is doing is right. But his unjust tactics and ignorance of the Numantians' will to remain free result in Cipión's failure to gain the glory he seeks. (Kahn 2008, p.150)

One cannot help but think of indigenous Americans when the Numantians die of disease and starvation. The Numantians' principal flaw, through no fault of their own, is that they are pre-Christian Spaniards who can never rejoice in Christ the Saviour. Although they are virtuous pagans, they still must be destroyed in the purifying flames created by their own hands to ensure the coming of the Catholic faith.

Likewise, Shakespeare could have fashioned Henry V as the paragon of royal English righteousness, a man wholly convinced of his divine rights to the French throne. Instead, his epic hero is flawed, plagued by the sins of his father and burdened by the responsibilities he carries; the description of the man that the Chorus gives us in his interventions, which align more to Holinshed's description of the man, represents the idealised version of Henry that is, in fact, quite distant from the self-reflective character we see on stage. Henry IV recognized his sin and swore to go on pilgrimage to Jerusalem to absolve himself, but he did not live long enough to fulfil his promise; dying in the Jerusalem Chamber of Westminster Abbey was not sufficient. Henry V swears to go on Crusade to Jerusalem and even battle the Turks in Constantinople, even though historically the fall of Christian Byzantium would not take place until nearly forty years after Agincourt, but he fails to do so. It is not beyond Henry's capabilities to rectify his inherited sin, but his early death prevents it. Instead, his demise, decreed by the fates themselves, provides the necessary pathway for the coming of the Tudors. However, how much this play supports the Tudor myth is still unclear, as Henry VII also took his crown by murdering the king. Just as the lasting effect of *La Numancia* was the human suffering of the righteous weak, perhaps the audience of *Henry V* left the theatre contemplating the imminent demise of the House of Tudor.

The epic poem was considered by Aristotle as the noblest form of poetry, and poets in England and Spain of the late sixteenth century reached into the histories of their respective countries to contribute to the development of a national heritage. The epic is a style of writing that is most "suitable for recording past deeds" (Burrow 2018, 35), and the stage served as a platform, literally and figuratively, to provide a commentary on the world in which they lived. I do not intend to infer that the ambiguity present in these works indicates that Shakespeare and Cervantes subscribed to multiple viewpoints, and nor are they anti-monarchy or anti-empire, but as history plays, we must also take into consideration that we know what happens to these characters after the curtain falls, and this article has demonstrated that this peripheral knowledge contributes to our understanding, or lack thereof, of the characterisation of the dramatis personae. Shakespeare and Cervantes, two of the great masters of their craft, found purpose in the theatre and cause us to read between the lines of their versions of national epic.

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