

Necrophilic Empathy: An Urgent Reading of Miguel de Cervantes's *La Numancia*

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This essay continues a conversation that began several years ago between Brad Nelson, an early modern scholar of Hispanic literature, and two specialists in Education, Vivek Venkatesh and Jason Wallin, concerning the use and misuse of public spectacle and the social media that frame said spectacles with respect to the modern phenomenon of hate speech. Nelson's research has centered on emblematic allegory, the political use of visual spectacle and, lately, aesthetic mediations of early modern scientific thought. His interest in the religious, ethnic, and racial 'othering' that occurs with such frequency and efficacy in Spanish Golden Age theater was the point of departure for fruitful discussions and collaborations with Venkatesh's and Wallin's work on homologous modes of violence in and surrounding various extreme metal scenes. Venkatesh has theorised how individual and communal identities influence the production and consumption of narratives of dystopia, racism, violence and terrorism in post-modern contexts. His work is grounded in elements of social pedagogy, which—in an era of post-web 2.0—advocate for the reflexive and inclusive adoption of mobile and digital media in creating frameworks for pluralistic dialogues. Venkatesh's research is constantly shaped through interactions and mediations with the broader public via the internationally-renowned Grimposium festival and conference series which highlights music, writing and visual art from the underground extreme metal and electronic music scenes, and the SOMEONE (Social Media Every Day) portal which features multimedia and curricula to counter hateful narratives in online environments. Wallin's research attends to the psychoanalysis of hate and its vehicles in popular media and media consumption. Attending specifically to film and music media that explore hatred and horror, Wallin's work attempts to articulate the precursors of hate and the particular psychological make-up that founds hateful speech and actions. Whether directed at the various oth-

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ers assembled by and respond to nationalistically motivated identities, gender constructions, racial and ethnic antagonisms, etc., the homologies between early modern Hispanic iterations of othering and postmodern expressions arising from extreme metal music performances (Venkatesh et al., Wallin and Venkatesh) and other “dark” expressions of postmodern art and media, these perceived commonalities were striking enough to the three of us that this discussion and analysis became both urgent and necessary. In addition, the current proliferation of crisis mentalities tied to very real threats against democratic institutions and public discourse at the local, national, and international levels provided an equally urgent motivation to compare and contrast the political, aesthetic, and ideological mechanisms and strategies at the heart of early modern imperialism with the neoliberal and neoconservative reordering of economic and biopolitical life. In short, apocalyptic constructions and mentalities at the beginning and end of modernity—if modernity can be said to have existed at all (Latour)—brought the three of us together to combine our efforts to locate and mobilize the critical and progressive potential of Miguel de Cervantes’s “nationalistic” tragedy *La Numancia*.

Since the three of us are approaching *La Numancia* from different critical traditions and practices, rather than attempt to collapse or weave our three perspectives into a singular, closed narrative, we thought it would be more productive and, indeed, more Cervantine to treat our interventions as three “acts,” which, although heading in the same direction, ultimately will leave threads hanging for future development, by us or someone else. Moreover, instead of eliding the obvious anachronisms at the heart of our project, we have chosen to follow the lead of Julio Baena, William Childers, David Castillo, William Egginton, and others in considering Cervantes our contemporary, much as Baena and Nelson argue that figures such as Herodotus, Cervantes, and Pink Floyd are contemporaries in their analyses and critiques of imperialistic enterprises, whether ancient, early modern, or postmodern.¹ Nevertheless, a brief roadmap of our discussion is probably in order to help orient our patient readers.

The essay begins by situating *La Numancia* within the apocalyptic framework for this volume, a relatively straightforward task given the spectacularly tragic and violent denouement of the play. We then frame our initial discussion of the play according to a recent adaptation by the Spanish theatrical company *Verboproducciones*, written by Florián Recio and directed by Paco Carrillo. This powerful performance was both motivated and informed by the European Union’s punitive imposition of austerity measures on Greece in 2014 which directly attacked the country’s social welfare state and democratic institutions and traditions.² This opening discussion uses Panayota Gounari’s concept of “social necrophilia” to analyze how Cervantes’s text stages the progressive destruction of Numancia’s political, communal, and personal

allegiances and relationships by Scipio's relentless and inhumane siege of the Iberian stronghold. The second act continues this discussion by analyzing the dehumanization of the colonized subject through Giorgio Agamben's concepts of *homo sacer* and *zoe*. Following Agamben's analysis of sovereign power and its legislative control over those it subjugates, this section attempts to grapple with both the condemned status of the Numantines from the vantage of its Roman invaders and, further, the question of how one might act in the face of dehumanization and the colonial separation of life from political and legal rights. Finally, in act three, we introduce the concept of *necrophilic empathy* in order to elucidate Cervantes's lessons on imperialism for both early and late modern spectators and readers, specifically, the notion that apocalyptic productions such as *La Numancia* produce both a deadened enjoyment of excessive violence and an ironically apathetic empathy with the objects and subjects of said violence. In other words, Cervantes's *meta*-commentary in *La Numancia* deals with the theater's ideological potential to engage the spectator in assessing his own the enjoyment of the symbolic violence on the stage and the relation of said violence to real violence produced in the imperialistic project.

Act 1

If there is a classical Spanish play that can be said to be apocalyptic, Miguel de Cervantes's *La Numancia* would be it. From the sixteen-year Roman siege that climaxes with the Numantine warriors massacring their wives and children before turning their swords on each other and themselves; to the quasi-Eucharistic *cum* cannibalistic motifs and failed rituals that resist a straightforward reading (Maestro; Graf); to the Roman general Scipio's merciless isolation and embargo of the small city that drives the besieged population to suffer the devastating physical, emotional, and cognitive effects of what Panayota Gounari calls "social necrophilia," Cervantes's early play serves up an areligious spectacle of the immolating effects of political and economic imperialism. As the recent staging of the play by the Spanish company Verboproducciones attests, the persistent effort by scholars and critics to convert Cervantes's humanistic tragedy into a nationalistic beacon of ethno-political triumphalism (Vivar) cannot overcome the harsh incrimination of geopolitical expansionism, nor the heart-wrenching spectacle of human suffering that results from empire's drive for absolute dominion.³ Explicitly framed by the director Carrillo's experience as a Spanish citizen of the EU who witnesses the inhumane imposition of draconian austerity measures on the social, political, and economic institutions of Greece in 2014, Verboproducciones' neo-clas-

sical translation activates the anti-institutional and anti-globalization themes and structures of Cervantes's play in order to attack the main assumptions of neoliberal "common sense" (Stuart Hall). At the same time, Carrillo's powerful use of the Greek chorus—which replaces the allegorical figures in Cervantes's play—annihilates the so-called fourth theatrical wall in the opening scene in order to compel the audience to personally engage with a story and human experience that is not limited to BCE Numancia, or the sixteenth-century victims of Hapsburg political and economic expansion (Hermenegildo), but is instead "eternal."

But before bringing Cervantes's 1581 play, and this essay, into the current moment, we would like to point out that *La Numancia* is the most apocalyptic of Spanish plays only if one reads the Baroque *comedia de indios* in a straightforward manner.⁴ What Cervantes does with his play, as has been pointed out by Barbara Simerka and others, is to situate the nativist triumphalism of later plays, such as Calderón de la Barca's *Aurora en Copacabana*, or Lope de Vega's *El Nuevo mundo descubierto por Cristóbal Colón*, within the more immediate and recognizable terrain of Old Castile at a time when memories of Charles I's eradication of peninsular communal independence, his son Philip II's excesses in the Netherlands, or the atrocious behavior of the *conquistadores* in the Americas were still fresh in Spaniards' minds (Avalle-Arce; Castro). Cervantes's complex framing of 'patriotic' sacrifices and imperial aspirations compels us to reconsider Calderón's representation of the *providential* conquest of the Incas by the likes of Pizarro, Almagro, and Candía from the point of view of the Incas. In this much darker light, it becomes apparent that what allows the Incan warrior Iupangui and the priestess Guacolda to survive under their new Spanish lords is the absolute surrender of their language, culture, religion, social status, political power, even their native clothes, all eloquently symbolized by their new names: Francisco and María. Theirs is an unconditional capitulation, initiated by the internal colonization of Iupangui's mind and desire by the image of the Virgin Mary, and brought to completion by the Vice-regal authority of Spain.⁵ Cervantes's staging of Scipio's arrogant rejection of the Numantine delegation's offer of a dignified surrender, which would afford them limited self-determination and some collective honor, sheds a disturbing light on the benign smile of the Virgin Mary with which Calderón ends his cleansing and historically revisionist staging of the Andean encounter. What Cervantes does, in other words, is illuminate the necrophilic annihilation of otherness implicit in the drive of globalizing regimes to consume, absorb, or simply erase the other into a totalizing order, whether military, in the case of the Romans, or religious-mercantilist, in the case of early modern Spain.⁶

As Carrillo's production demonstrates, there are a number of compelling homologies between Cervantes's framing of the ways in which General Scipio's siege incrementally divides and consumes the society and lives of the inhabitants of Numancia and the decidedly necrophilic mechanisms of neoliberal globalization: such as Scipio's refusal to accept anything but an unconditional surrender to Roman power; or the ways in which the siege undermines all of the local institutions in Numancia; or finally, how the crises his military campaign provokes are then used as reasons for intensifying his dehumanization of the Numantines. In the words of Luis Avilés, "the new strategy does transform a limited war into what could be called a war of annihilation or total war, one that does not follow the principle of discrimination (distinguishing the legitimate enemy from the civilian population) and, consequently converts all inhabitants into targets, since hunger will affect the entire population, including women and children" (256). With respect to our current political upheavals, Stuart Hall describes the victimizing strategy behind Scipio's increasingly strident blaming of the Numantines for their increasingly desperate attempts to safeguard their lives and institutions: "The 'failed (or failing) states' which Western strategists proclaim to be a major threat to security are themselves often the perverse consequences of neoliberalism and western intervention. And the very concept of failed state is often used as an ideological weapon" (12). In Scipio's own words, "Si estando deshambrios y encerrados / muestran tan demasiado atrevimiento, / ¿qué hicieran siendo libres y enterados / en sus fuerzas primeras y ardimiento? / ¡Indómitos! ¡Al fin seréis domados, / porque contra el furor vuestro violento / se tiene de poner la industria nuestra, / que de domar soberbios es maestro!" (vv 1788–90) (If starving and caged they show such daring, what might they be capable of when free and restored to their original strength and fire? Indomitable! In the end you will be tamed, because against your violent furor we must deploy our industry, since it is master over the arrogant). There is no better example of how imperial power places the blame for its excessive violence on the victims of that very violence, all of which looks very much like Columbus's erasure of indigenous social, political, and even sexual institutions and differentiations in his diaries. As historians Anthony Pagden and Lyle McAlister explain, these "first-hand" or "eye-witness" accounts functioned to legitimize the colonization of *inhabited* lands through an *a priori* description of native populations as bereft of social, religious, and political institutions, making them legally *uninhabited*.

Verboproducciones' powerful adaptation begins with a chorus dressed in humble robes declaiming that the history of Numancia and its refusal to live life under a tyrant who offers them "a simulacrum of life, a foreshortened life" is an "eternal history" of the power of saying "no!" to anything but a "complete, full, and self-possessed" life (Recio 2). This unanimous cry for hu-

manity and freedom is followed by the first scene of the play, which shows a hardened veteran of the Roman campaign, blind drunk and delirious from the effects of PTSD, whose attempt to fall on his own sword is interrupted by the uninvited appearance of a new recruit. The contrast between the disillusioned self-disgust of the veteran and the ideological enthusiasm and obedience of the recruit, still eager to win fame for himself and his family on the battlefield, frames the entire sequence of Scipio's cynical and slow starvation of the Numantine soldiers and civilians. It is the veteran, for example, who explains how Scipio "Que vendrá, si es que no son meros rumores, nos hará morir a unos cuantos, tomará el oro y la plata de estos salvajes, se volverá a su casa más rico, más famoso, y nosotros seguiremos aquí, rascándonos los piojos" (Recio 4) (He will come, if it is not just a rumor, will cause a few of us to die, will take the gold and silver from those savages, and will return home richer, more famous, and we will remain here, scratching lice) (our translation). When this scene ends, with the recruit helping the veteran back to camp for more wine, Carrillo amplifies the confusion of Cervantes's normally conflicted spectator, simultaneously enlisting and threatening the audience members by having Roman soldiers position themselves in the aisles of the Roman theatre in Mérida and shout out their allegiance to imperial power alongside the spectators when Scipio orders them to fall in. This breaking of the "fourth wall" does not work to create critical distance between the spectator and representation but rather close it off, compelling the spectators to feel both the attraction and ominous threat embodied by the host of soldiers, who raise their swords and shout death to Numancia.

It is of course Cervantes who provides the not-so-raw material for the contemporary director and playwright by channeling his historical inquiry through individual and allegorical characters who multiply and complicate rather than unify and simplify the meaning of the play. This is no straightforward celebration of "civilization"; nor is it an unproblematic celebration of the victims of empire. Rather, it is a penetrating look at the dehumanizing effects of the technology of war and an imperialistic reason of state on both the victors and the victims. As Georges Güntert points out, it is all but impossible for the spectator to identify with or totally condemn either party in the tragedy (271).

In Numancia, the situation is much worse, in large part because the characters bear no personal responsibility for the unjust and hopeless situation imposed on them by the imperial project, unlike what we have seen with the veteran and the recruit, whose original belief in the cause of the empire and the desire for fame and wealth have led them to this remote outpost in Hispania. The ideals of the Numantines, in fact, are not inconsistent with progressive, democratic values: such as the belief in collective self-determination; the belief

in the value of dialogue and negotiation; and the belief that personal sacrifice may be necessary to accomplish a collective goal. The current problem is that the centralized power and punitive fiscal policies of the EU are not necessarily in conflict with the more localized democratic institutions that exercise that same power; or, if the democratic institutions do attempt to protect the citizenry, the global nature of neoliberal capitalism joins with international political alliances to suppress autonomous political action. In Gounari's words, "By social necrophilia, I mean the blunt organized effort on the part of the domestic political system and foreign neoliberal centers to implement economic policies and austerity measures that result in the physical, material, social, and financial destruction of human beings: policies that promote death, whether physical or symbolic" (3). This is what happens to Numancia under Scipio's siege, as a number of critics have argued through analyses that compare Scipio's imperious violence with Hapsburg imperial projects and policies, both at home and abroad (King, Armstrong-Roche, Hermenegildo, Avilés, Johnson). With respect to Numancia's "domestic political system," it is Theogenes, the leader of the Numantines, who orders his citizenry to destroy their material possessions and offer their own necks to the swords of their own soldiers.

In continuing this discussion, we will move to the original play by Cervantes, since the scenes that most interest our analysis are the ones that have been retouched the least in Recio's adapted script in prose. The scenes in question take place just before the Numantines decide to take their own lives rather than: a) passively succumb to the hunger that has turned them into shadows of their former selves; or b) unconditionally surrender themselves and their children's future to the Romans. In order to increase the tragic irony of the play, Cervantes opens the pivotal third act with Scipio's self-congratulatory praise of the evident success of his strategy, which consists of a total embargo—economic, political, social—of Numancia: "¿Qué gloria puede haber más levantada / en las cosas de la guerra que aquí digo / que, sin quitar de su lugar la espada, vencer y sujetar al enemigo?" (vv 1131–34) (Could there be a higher glory in war than, as I have said, defeating and subjecting the enemy without lifting a sword?) (our translation). In direct answer to what is framed as a rhetorical question, the Numantine delegation, desperate to end the suffering of its civilian population, enters at this very moment and offers to send a single challenger to fight Rome's best warrior in a winner-takes-all combat. The literal answer to Scipio's rhetorical question, in other words, is that nothing could be less glorious, at least where war is concerned, than his patient and indiscriminate starvation of Numancia's women and children. His insulting rejection of the challenge sends the Numantines into an existential crisis whose end result is the total fragmentation of their social institutions.

This fragmentation begins in act 2, when priests attempt to carry out quasi-pagan religious rituals with the intent of finding out what future awaits the besieged city. When the calf that is about to be sacrificed is whisked away by a competing deity, and a Numantine who has just died of starvation and is brought to life begs to return to the afterlife rather than illuminate his former countrymen, Numancia's fate is sealed through the conversion of its religious practices into theatrical farce. Jesús Maestro has argued that "the pure reality is that the Numantines. . . use magic for merely proleptic and oracular ends. In the end, political. They only want to know what will be the outcome of their imprisonment. There is no religious disquiet in their relation with the numinous" (12; our translation).

When the Numantine delegation returns home with empty hands, the high priest Theogenes exhorts his starving soldiers to storm the enemy walls "salgamos a morir a la campaña, / y no como cobardes en estrecho" (vv 1246–1247) (let us leave to die on the field of battle, and not like hemmed-in cowards) (our translation). But the emissary Caravino reminds the high priest that the women will permit no act that leaves them and their children at the mercy of the Roman legions. In the words of the women, "Nuestro cuello ofreced a las espadas / vuestras primero, que es mejor partido / que vernos de enemigos deshonoradas" (vv 1296–1298) (offer our throats to your swords first, which is a better fate than seeing us dishonored by our enemies) (our translation). Or, where the children are concerned, "¿Queréis dejar, por ventura, / a la romana arrogancia / las vírgenes de Numancia / para mayor desventura? / ¿Y a los libres hijos vuestros / queréis esclavos dejallos? / ¿No será mejor ahogallos / con los propios brazos vuestros?" (vv 1310–1317). (Do you want to, by chance, the virgins of Numancia to Roman arrogance and increase their misfortune, and allow your free sons to be slaves? Would it not be better to drown them with your own arms) (our translation). It is at this point that the high priest commands the Numantines to build a fire into which they will throw all of their possessions, after which sacrilege the soldiers will massacre their wives and children and then commit suicide, all in an effort to deprive Scipio of his "military" victory. And in order to gain strength for this last desperate action, Theogenes entreats his citizens to eat the Roman prisoners of war they have captured in a cannibalistic gesture that lacks any ritualistic or Eucharistic framework or intent whatsoever. In a theoretically insightful reading of the play, Avilés argues that "The strong bond between objects and human beings is severed by the anticipation of death" (261). This observation underlines the radical alteration of the Numantines' cognitive relationship with reality under the siege.

It is worth dwelling for a moment on the various types of fragmentation that occur in Numancia. In the first place, the breakdown of the religious sac-

rifices and rituals signals both the social and political fragmentation of the city, as the rituals are not directed at social cohesion but rather at the Roman presence, as Maestro observes, since what Theogenes seeks is knowledge about whether or not the Numantines will survive the siege. Cervantes gives the whole scene an Oedipal thrust in the Sphinx-like answer of the annoyed citizen who has been magically resurrected after having starved to death: “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 habrá albergue en sus contrarios senos; / el amigo cuchillo, el homicida / de Numancia será, y será su vida” (The Romans will not carry the victory over the strong Numancia, nor will she [Numancia] triumph or glory over the enemy, being good enemies and friends; do not take this to mean that there will be a memory of peace harbored in their contrary bosoms; the friendly knife will be Numancia’s murderer, as well as its life). Just as Oedipus seals his ignominious fate by attempting to avoid it, Scipio ensures his own defeat by relentlessly and pitilessly avoiding any Roman losses, even as Theogenes devolves to a quasi-cannibalistic beast in the search for transcendence. This ritual fragmentation is immediately followed by Theogenes’ loss of authority, when the women of Numancia protest his plan to send the city’s soldiers on a suicide mission against the Romans. Eventually, this fragmentation will become absolute when fathers and husbands are forced to chase down their children and wives in order to comply with the high priest’s desperate strategy to deprive the Romans of their victory. But before the climax of the play, Cervantes introduces some much more personal scenes to illustrate how the foreign invasion has impacted the heretofore autonomous and unified community.

In act 3, a mother asks her son why he continues to nurse when she has no milk to give: “¿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 / y procura de hartarte, / que no pueden ya llevarte / mis flacos cansados brazos. / Hijos del ánima mía / ¿con qué os podré sustentar, / si apenas tengo qué os dar / de la propia sangre mía? / ¡Oh hambre terrible y fuerte / cómo me acabas la vida! / ¡Oh guerra, sólo venida / para causarme la muerte!” (vv 1708–1723) (What are you drinking, sad creature? / ¿Can’t you feel that, to spite me, instead of drawing milk from my withered breast, you take pure blood? Take this flesh piece by piece and try to fill yourself up, because my weak arms can no longer hold you. Children, my sweet joy, how can I sustain you when I hardly have anything to give you but my own blood? Oh, terrible and mighty hunger, how you terminate my life! Oh, war, only come to cause my death!). As Eric Graf and Maestro have pointed out, the life-giving ritual of the Eucharist becomes a necrophilic abomination under the extreme

conditions imposed by Rome's imperialistic policies and Scipio's perverse definition of "just war." Moreover, if we take the mother figure for a symbol of the *madre patria*, her sacrifice only leads to more death: "Hijo, cerca está la plaza / adonde echaremos luego / en mitad del vivo fuego / el peso que te embaraza" (vv 1728–1731) (Son, the plaza is near where we will soon hurl into the middle of the raging fire the burden that weighs you down) (our translation). War has completely destroyed the embodied connection between mother and child, or motherland and citizen.

Also in act 3, the lovers Marandro and Lira lament the terrible effects of hunger on the city. In response to Marandro's worried questions about what's on her mind, Lira answers:

Que me tiene tal la hambre
que de mi vital estambre
llevará presto la palma.
¿Qué tálamo has de esperar
de quien está en tal extremo,
que te aseguro que temo
antes de una hora espirar?
Mi hermano ayer espiró,
de la hambre fatigado;
mi madre ya ha acabado,
que la hambre la acabó.
Y si la hambre y su fuerza
no ha rendido mi salud
es porque la juventud
contra su rigor me esfuerza.
Pero como ha tantos días
que no le hago defensa,
no pueden contra su ofensa
las débiles fuerzas mías. (vv 1479–1497)

(Hunger has me in such a state that it will soon reign victorious over my life's thread. What sort of wedding bed can you hope for from someone in such extremes, and I assure you that I am afraid I will be dead in less than an hour? My brother passed away yesterday, exhausted by hunger; my mother is finished, as hunger finished her; and if hunger and its force have not overcome my health, it is because my youth strengthens

me against her rigor; but since it has been so many days since I have defended myself, my weakened forces can do nothing against her offensive.)

We have included the entire passage in order to show how Cervantes brings the audience to experience the cumulative effect of hunger on the body, on the spirit, and on the fundamental unit of social cohesion, the family...and he does not stop there.

Marandro, not understanding that even if Lira had food she would not be able to eat in her current state, decides to go over the wall and steal food from the Roman soldiers, breaking ranks with Theogenes' law and doing exactly what the women tried to prevent the men from doing. On his way out of the city he runs into his best friend Leonicio, and the two of them come to blows over whether Leonicio is going to come with him or not, intensifying the sense of social fragmentation. When Marandro finally relents, the end result of their raid is a small piece of bread, which Leonicio pays for with his life. When Marandro returns to Lira with his hard-won prize, Cervantes returns to the Eucharistic theme, but with an apocalyptic tone equal to if not darker than the scene in which the mother was unable to nurse her son with anything but her own blood. Marandro explains to his wife that he has brought the sacrificial sustenance back to her, before dying in her arms due to the injuries he received during his hopeless quest. Lira laments:

Hicisteis una salida,
 esposo mío, de suerte
 que, por escusar mi muerte,
 me habéis quitado la vida.
 ¡Oh pan, de la sangre lleno
 que por mí se derramó!,
 no te tengo en cuenta, no,
 de pan, sino de veneno.
 ¡No te llegaré a mi boca
 que por poderme sustentar,
 si no es para besar
 esta sangre que te toca! (vv 1876–1887)

(You left me, my husband, in such a way, that by excusing my death, you have taken away my life. Oh, bread filled with blood that was spilled for my sake! I do not consider you, no, to be bread, but rather venom! I will

not bring you to my mouth to give me sustenance, except to kiss this blood that is yours!)

It is here where the necrophilic drive of empire and nationalistic destiny meet in the failed juxtaposition of courtly love and religious transcendence. Marandro's love-inspired blood sacrifice is not life-giving in either the here-and-now, nor in the Christian sense of spiritual transcendence. Willard King and Armstrong-Roche, for example, interpret the collective suicide of the Numantines as the ultimate protest against the violent and punitive imperial policies of King Philip II in the moment just before the implosion of these same policies in the defeat of the 'Invincible' Spanish Armada in 1588.

We posit that Cervantes goes even further in impugning the arrogant gesture of all imperial initiatives by revealing that the drawing of distinctions through which the legal apparatus of just war legitimizes its symbolic and physical violence is itself the crux of the matter. Zygmunt Bauman uses Giorgio Agamben's concept of *homo sacer* to explain how this has functioned in modernity:

Law would never reach universality without its right to draw the limit to its application, creating by the same token a universal category of the exempted/excluded, and the right to lay out an 'out of bounds,' providing thereby the dumping ground for the ones who are excluded, recycled into human waste....[And the] ideal-typical model of an excluded being is offered by the *homo sacer*, a category of ancient Roman law "set outside human jurisdiction without being brought into the realm of divine law." (31–32)

Cervantes frames the Numantines under Scipio's powerful gaze as precisely these excluded and eventually discarded human beings whose primary political function is to highlight the power of Rome under Scipio's stewardship. By anticipating their dehumanization and reduction through the annihilation of their possessions and, eventually, themselves, the Numantines denude Roman power for what it is: a regime whose primary characteristic and predominate means of expression is necrophilia.

Act 2: The Problem of Life: Necrophilia and Homo Sacer in Cervantes's *Numancia*; or, Numancias's Undead Prophet

Besieged by Roman forces rallied by General Scipio, Cervantes portrays the divestment of Numantine life from its social and political character, hence reducing it to what Agamben refers to as *zoe* or rather, the raw life or basic requirements of the organism. More accurately, it is from the vantage of Roman sovereign power that the people of Numancia are *already homo sacer*, or “life that may be killed but not sacrificed” (106). In other words, it is from the vantage of Roman sovereign power that Numancia is already an outlaw and exile state made subject to death. Yet, the aim of the siege is not merely the annihilation of Numancia's people, but their investment as *zoe* to the Roman Empire. As proselytized in Cervantes's play, the fate of Numancia is bound to its permanently exiled status. The mode of prophecy is as significant as the message, delivered by the resurrected dead, or rather, through the incarnation of *zoe* or bare life into a corpse. Equally significant is that the undead prophet of Numancia entreats the priest responsible for his ritualistic resurrection to return him to death. The appeal made by Numancia's undead prophet suggests different, albeit coinciding messages by functioning most obviously as a prophetic articulation of the future, but also, as a prophetic mode of answering to the Other via thanatosis, and through death, as a way of rejecting the condition of *homo sacer* of which the undead is itself an articulation. Cervantes's vision of the events of Numancia coincide herein with the stakes surrounding the status of life under exile, for where Cervantes's undead prophet decries its necromantic capture, this entreaty is enfolded within the very event of *zoe*'s investment under sovereign power figured in the tragedy. For like the undead prophet, who exists as alive but beholden to the necromantic incantation that captured it, the people of Numancia live as ‘killable life’ under what Agamben dubs the state of exception, or rather, the state of being exiled or banned from judicio-political consideration and rights. This state of exile is, as Agamben develops, a condition of *homo sacer*.

The Beasts of Numancia

Cervantes's *La Numancia* reveals the fundamental significance of *zoe* from the vantage of Empire, which functions by excluding from *bios* (political and legal life) the raw life or *zoe* of the conquered and, in so doing, rallies raw life to the service of Roman sovereignty as *homo sacer* or, as that term suggests, in a state exempt from legal right. This is again to express a condition of *homo sacer* as it is both excluded and included within sovereign power, wherein

the context of Cervantes's tragedy is manifest as the Roman Empire. Within the state of exception from both legal consideration and political personhood issued by the Empire, the Numantines become dissolved as civic beings and banned in the sense that to be banned intimates that one is already dead, at least from the vantage of its exile from political life (*bios*) if literally in the transformation of its life as killable (105). Yet, to reiterate the imbrication of exile and investment articulated in Agamben's definition of *homo sacer*, the people of Numancia are nonetheless invested within the political and social life of the Roman Empire, but as a life without legal personhood or rather, as *raw life* (106). In part, the imbricated condition of *homo sacer*'s exile and inclusion is dramatized in Cervantes's account of dehumanization at Numancia. For from the vantage of the Roman General Scipio, the Numantines are but animals and beasts, which is to say, from the vantage of Empire, they are but raw life divested of socio-political rights.

The process of dehumanization figured in Cervantes's *Numancia* parallels Agamben's account of *homo sacer* in that each articulates a process of dehumanization through which life is divested of its socio-political relations through its affiliation with animality or bestial life. As Agamben details in his account of *homo sacer*, the exile finds expression as a liminal figure passing between "animal and man, *physis* and *nomos*, exclusion and inclusion" (105). As a rearticulation of the exiled yet included status of *homo sacer*, Agamben refers more specifically here to the liminal status of the *bandit* ('to ban') and its millennium old link to the animal. In Germanic and Anglo-Saxon sources, Agamben articulates, the figure of the *bandit* ('the banned') is defined as a "wolf-man (*wargus*, *werwolf* . . .)," "*loup garou*, 'werewolf,'" and elsewhere, as having a "wolf's head . . . *wulfesheud*" (105). As Cervantes dramatizes, the status of life in Numancia is not simply made resonant with the life of animals, but rather, is cast into indistinction whereby life is no longer human in the sense of having socio-political and legal rights. This is not to say that the Numantines are animals *per se*, although their enunciation as animals is significant in that the definition of *zoe* given by the Greeks refers expressly to animality distinct and excluded from *bios*. More accurately, the dehumanization to which Numancia is subject renders their lives neither human *nor* animal, but paradoxically excluded from either while invested in both. It is this paradox that characterizes *homo sacer*, whose exiled life is concomitantly linked to its rehabilitation under the mechanisms of Empire as raw, expendable life. This is largely corroborated by accounts of slavery during the reign of the Roman Empire, which articulate the ways in which the enslaved were both exiled from the rights of legal personhood but simultaneously invested as raw life within the machinery of Empire.

The Already-Dead

The status of *homo sacer* as *already-dead* coincides with both the figures of the undead prophet and bestial status ascribed to the Numantines, as each coincides with the state of exclusion under which Numantine life might be taken without committing homicide in its juridical sense (1998). More generally, we might understand the already-dead status of the Numantines as a mechanism of Roman imperialism, by which Numancia and its people are already colonially annexed under the abstract principle of Empire and its powers to remove and capture life. Herein, the prophetic necromancy of Numancia's priests is redoubled in the necrophilic ardor of General Scipio and the Roman Empire, who divest Numantine life from *bios* while consuming the remains of this process. As Cervantes dramatizes, Empire does not simply mete out death, but in enacting death in its political-legal sense, captures the residue or raw life that persists. It is remarkable to note that the condition of *homo sacer* in Cervantes's *Numancia* obliquely coincides with Foucault's (2012) articulation of biopower, in which the fundamental political reference of sovereign power pertains to the investment of *zoe* within its modes of production and repetition. The authentically political character of bare life articulated in Foucault's conceptualization of biopower imperfectly corresponds with the aims of Empire in Cervantes's play in that each articulate the primacy of raw life as it is rearticulated from the vantage of sovereign power. As a precursor to the biopolitical character of the modern State then, Cervantes articulates the capture of life through its dehumanization and subsequent reinvestment in Empire. Herein, Cervantes dramatizes the necrophilic drive of Empire in its production of socio-political death (*bios*) and concomitant consumption of *zoe* as it is reinscribed within the circuits of Empire itself.

Zombie Politics

Empire's attraction to the scene of death, at least of that socio-political variety Agamben dubs *bios*, runs inexactly counterpart to the contemporary state of life under neoliberalism. Despite the asynchronicity between the events of Cervantes's siege at Numancia and the radical transformation of power and its modes of capture in the contemporary moment, it nevertheless occurs that the function of power remains invested in the process of exiling life that base life might be reterritorialized within Empire. In oblique relation to the figures of the undead prophet and 'animal-man' figured in Cervantes's play, Bang Larsen (2010) articulates how the zombie constitutes an index for the function of power under capitalism. Briefly, Larsen claims that the zombie coincides

with capitalism in that it dramatizes the condition of being alienated from socio-political life through the loss of one's labor power and productive capacity to influence the material order of political life. Further, and corollary to this alienation, the zombie figures as an index of the primacy accorded to raw life under capitalism, where *zoe* becomes rallied to the circuits of profit through the capture of its affective labor and basic needs (Larsen). To redeploy Agamben's terminology, the zombie allegorically refers to the state of exception under which life is exiled and yet invested as *zoe* within the contemporary conditions of permanent agitation and restlessness that are both symptoms and motors of capital. As Larsen articulates, the zombie is not, as common sense might have it, a figure of death, but more germane to the contemporary moment, a figure that marks the death of death. As Agamben would assert, stripped of its political life (*bios*) and reduced to pure *zoe*, the zombie lives on, but only at neuronal, and affective levels as a killable life (89).

Cervantes's *Numancia* articulates a quite different apparatus of capture, that is, the mechanisms whereby what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) dub the *war machine* is seized by the State. As Cervantes dramatizes, Scipio rallies his languishing Roman forces at Numancia to the project of encircling the city with a massive trench, therein preventing movement of resources and reinforcements—in effect starving the city while providing a bulwark against Numantine affronts. Scipio's strategy of capture is significant and not only for its unconditionally demoralizing mode of siege warfare. As articulated previously, the Iberian army at Numancia is seized by a state of exception in which they are deinvested from Roman law. Embodying the will of the Empire, Scipio redeploys the routed Roman efforts at Numancia on both material and political-legal fronts, striating the battlefield, to draw on Deleuze and Guattari (1987), and seizing Numancia's lines of escape. Herein, Scipio's military strategy is remarkable for the way it does not simply take the land, but rather, for its "determination of a juridical and a territorial ordering...and 'taking of the outside' intimate to the constitution of sovereign power" (Agamben 19). Referring to the thinking of both Deleuze and Guattari (1987) as well as Foucault's genealogy of mass confinement in *Madness and Civilization*, Agamben articulates the way in which sovereignty functions to capture the outside (*enfermer le dehors*) and, in so doing, constitutes the interiority of exception (18). Yet, and again to draw upon Deleuze and Guattari, there persists for Numancia a line of absolute deterritorialization in self-destruction that yet functions as an anathema to the capture apparatus of Empire. Herein, and generally speaking, the wholly original problem that Cervantes elicits in his dramatization of the siege is how to act or not when both exempted and encircled, exiled from Law while captured within the injunction that one's life might be taken without reprisal. For from the imperialist vantage of Roman

Law, the Numantines are *for* the Empire, belonging to it without the advantages political life involves.

Zoe Nihil

While obviously distinct in scale and setting, Bryan Singer's (1985) *The Usual Suspects* invokes a quite similar problematic to that posed in Cervantes's play. In the film, Singer's focal character and criminal mastermind Keiser Soze (played by Kevin Spacey) murders his own wife and child after they are kidnapped and held ransom by rival Hungarian criminals. Each confronts the similar problem of how to act when bare life is held to ransom. Significantly, and as Žižek (*The Fragile Absolute*) has developed, an answer to this question occurs by subtracting raw life from its capture, or as Žižek puts it, by "striking at oneself" (149). "Far from amounting to a case of impotent aggressivity turned against oneself," Žižek writes in *The Fragile Absolute*, Soze's act "changes the co-ordinates of the situation in which the subject finds itself" (150). Significantly, Soze recoils from self-annihilation, but the effect of his act transpires an entirely new problem for power and, in particular, power for which the sublation of raw life is a primary concern. Cervantes's dramatization of the Numantines' mass suicide evokes this very problem, which might be articulated, although not to say exhausted, along three fronts: the first, 'biopolitical'; the second, judicio-political; and the third, religious or metaphysical.

Suicidal Resistance

I

With the caveat that the events at Numancia only inexactly parallel the function of biopower in the modern political state, it might nevertheless be evidenced that Cervantes dramatizes the act of 'striking at oneself' as a means to resist the conscription of life under the existing Symbolic of enslavement to Empire. In a literal sense, of course, Cervantes articulates the act of 'striking at oneself' *qua* suicide. While we will later return to the significance of literal suicide in the play, it is crucial to remark that the act of 'striking at oneself' occurs also as a form of Symbolic suicide. That is, the mass-suicide at Numancia figures as an act of negation that rejects the Symbolic (of slavery) by preserving the dignity of its people, if not Spain, in a more allegorical sense. Simply, if not unevenly actualized in Cervantes's play, the mass-suicide at Numancia figures as a means to protect its people and nation from enslavement (Žižek,

The Fragile Absolute). As life coincides with the Symbolic of slavery, as it does in the events at Numancia, divestment from the Symbolic Order through the act of self-annihilation or Symbolic suicide constitutes a way of withdrawing from the world, or rather, the world rallied to the Symbolic mandate of Empire (Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute*). From the vantage of the Symbolic Order of Empire, the act of Symbolic self-annihilation poses an intractable problem in that the operation of the Symbolic requires first an internalized subject to which it is rallied. Through its act of self-negation, Cervantes's play articulates a refusal of the Symbolic Order that alters, to draw from Žižek, the very conditions of capture by resisting the submission of life to the Other figured in Cervantes's play as the Sovereign Law of the Roman Empire.

II

Overlooked in this consideration of Symbolic self-annihilation is, of course, the fact that the Numantines of Cervantes' play are *always-already* divested from political life (*bios*). Nevertheless, it remains significant that Cervantes's consideration of the problem of Empire articulates a form of resistance in which the subject to Empire is annihilated, hence denying the Symbolic (of slavery) to which the people of Numancia are rallied in capture and enclosure. This posed, the originality of Cervantes's response to Empire is equally linked to a form of juridico-political resistance. While Cervantes articulates how the Numantine *polis* is reduced to raw life produced through its exile from political rights and personhood (*bios*), *Numancia* yet figures as a resistance to Roman Law in its dramatization of mass suicide as an event of 'giving the law to oneself.' As Foucault develops in *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1.*, the act of suicide poses a problem to power and, specifically, to the presumed right of sovereign power over *raw life*. As Foucault develops, where raw life is presumed property of sovereign power and owed to its juridico-political mechanisms, the act of suicide is banned. Consisting in the act of giving the law to oneself, suicide marks a transgression of the law permissible only to the sovereign, who, existing both within and without the law, is capable of invoking a state of exception in which it is no longer subject, but defining agent. While the invocation of the state of exception is not afforded to *homo sacer*, it is nonetheless significant that the mass suicide dramatized in Cervante's play articulates a mode of resistance in which the Numantines subtract themselves from their inscription within Roman Law and henceforth indebtedness to Empire as raw life. Giving the law to themselves, the Numantines invoke an outside law ('outlaw') in which their lives are no longer presumed subject to Empire, but to the production of conditions for escaping its capture. In terms of the historical reception of the play, it becomes immediately evident in an analysis such is this that the identification of the Numantines as pro-

to-Spaniards re inscribes their zoe into a Spanish national project of historical and legal legitimation and, in fact, becomes the very foundation of that legal identity against which non-Iberian-catholic-Castilian others will be judged and absorbed, or spat out.

III

Alongside the imperfect biopolitical and judicio-political acts of escape by the besieged Numantines, Cervantes stages a metaphysical resistance to Empire by obliquely evoking the scene of Christ's crucifixion. The significance of this allegory pertains not only to the question of life's status in a state of capture, or to the figure of Jesus' defiance to the tyranny of Empire; rather, the more significant allegorical relation of the siege at Numancia to the crucifixion pertains again to the act of 'striking at oneself.' In the scene of the crucifixion, God strikes at himself by allowing the murder of his son. Yet, and as Žižek develops in *The Ticklish Subject*, by allowing such negation, the act creates a new set of conditions permitting the rise of the Holy Spirit and magnification of God's power. Cervantes's play similarly dramatizes the allegorical act of 'striking at oneself' so that one or, more accurately, one's *nation* might be *reborn*. Drawing upon Žižek, who articulates the birth of the Holy Ghost as an effect of *negation*, the rebirth of the Spanish *polis* ('people') figured in Cervantes's play might be thought to rely similarly on negation as a process for evading interiorization and submission to sovereign rule (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004). Cervantes's allegorical reference to the crucifixion is hence not simply a parallel of resistance or rebirth, but more significantly perhaps, constitutes a strategy of negation that subtracts life from its overdetermination under Empire. Intimate to Cervante's *Numancia* is the idea that negation, or rather, the subtraction of life from its conscription under the Other prepares new conditions for freedom from tyranny.

Act 3: Necrophilic Empathy

Our reading of the play constitutes a unique interdisciplinary approach to analyze and situate this difficult and enigmatic text. Some readings of Cervantes's *La Numancia*—which adopt a post-positivist lens—might seek to enunciate how the melancholic and tragic nature of the piece forces our gaze into the horrors of the neo-liberal mechanisms that govern the accelerated social, cultural and bio political frameworks that together serve to bring current society into a state of disrepair. In this last phase of analysis, we seek to describe a twisted take on the notion of empathy, both towards the supposed victims of crimes perpetrated by the State, but also towards the actors in the State who

misjudge the potency of their power and helplessly witness the destruction of those whom they should, by definition, protect. This empathy might be exemplified by a collective, societal sigh that mourns—in a dangerously apathetic way—the figurative vivisection of the Numantine matriarch and their children by its own sentinel while simultaneously enjoying the excessive violence in which they are all implicated, not unlike how postmodern spectators might vicariously enjoy, albeit ambivalently, the gruesome action of apocalyptic films and TV series. It might not be too far-reaching to presuppose that in killing its own kind, the Numantines—especially the women, who beseeched the men to kill them and their children rather than hand them over to the Romans—were toying with their political Roman counterparts. For if the State revealed their sleight of hand and intervened in halting the suicidal slaughter, they would commit themselves to the exertion of power over their citizens, and refuse them their right to choose life, and more importantly, their right to choose to die. For it is not too far-reaching to posit that the social necrophilia we allude to in earlier sections of our paper are mere abstractions of the suicidal desires that presuppose a horrifyingly reified necrophilia—a yearning to end all life including one’s own. Perhaps this empathy we speak of might also arise as a by-product of an acute criticism of the unfailingly despotic manner in which Scipio wields the power of the State to subjugate both his army and the Numantine populace. And yet, one must sense the despair in Scipio when he unwittingly participates in the extermination of the Numantines, thereby unwittingly fulfilling a prophecy which he might not have wanted to see realized. Perhaps it is only in that final moment, when Bariato commits suicide from a tower, that Scipio recognises that his goal of conquering the rogue city is misplaced, and that the path to the State’s righteousness to govern via its neo-capitalistic objectives would necessarily choke the life out of Numantine society. As heart-wrenching as the scene is which depicts the mother not having any milk in her breasts to feed her child, and the scene in which the young woman Lira refuses to eat bread which was derived from a bloody battle between her lover Marandro and his best friend Leoncio, there is a sense of dread and finality which renders these scenes as the only possible precursor to an apocalyptic dual end—both to Numantine society and to its possible rule by his best friend Leoncio—which we are not sure Scipio intended as a final outcome. For when the Numantines are finally dead, so is Scipio, for all practical purposes; and the audience is faced with the task of reflecting on not only whether the Numantines were shrewd enough to engineer such an ingenious coda, but when—if at all—Scipio knew that he had been outplayed.

It is not too bold to suggest that when Carrillo breaches the “fourth wall,” in his modern adaptation, our own accelerationist (Srnicek and Williams) leanings would push the audience to ponder its own duplicitous relationship with the

play's central actors. This is a necessary condition to ask the question: is there a hidden joy and complicity in relishing in the swollen ego of the State while at the same time acknowledging that one might lend a sympathetic ear to the Numantine populace who are hurtling in a haphazard fashion to not only their own suicidal demise but at the same time depleting the State of its main source of nourishment, i.e., the continued and somewhat endless embodiments of the desolation and suffering of its citizens? As reductionist as it seems, the binary of State versus society is the debate that Cervantes urges us to deliberate, and both post-modern as well as Classical readers will seek pleasure in the final outcome deriving from their respective deaths by their own respective hands. For the suicide of State is concomitant with the suicide of society, and both are essential elements of the accelerationist mechanisms that govern our post-capitalist future (Wallin and Venkatesh).

Following from this analysis, what if we instead adopted a position that Cervantes's *La Numancia* holds the potential to trigger what we will call "necrophilic empathy" in our society? Such a reading of "necrophilic empathy" would coincide with Lorenzo Magnani's reading of the psychoanalytic theorist Christopher Bollas' definition of the concept. Based on Bollas' work on serial killers, Magnani writes that "at first, serial killers present to their victims a kind of parental care, a charming environment of trust that—suddenly and together with a kind of catastrophic disillusion—they reverse to sanguinary violence, to reverberate their subjective drama: 'The serial killer—a *killed* self—seems to go on 'living' by transforming other selves into similarly killed ones, establishing a companionship of the dead' (Bollas 189)" (Magnani 218). This definition can be useful for describing how the projection of internal feelings of contamination and/or perversion onto ethnic, racial, or sexual others results in the attempt to annihilate the bestialized other, as occurs with Scipio, or the weakness and helplessness of the self, as arguably occurs with Theogenes in his excessive bloodlust at the end of the play. However, our own conception of necrophilic empathy is sufficiently aroused when it couples with the oversimplified inversions of the "necros" propagated by the media. Take, for example, the erosion and dilution of civility within social media and the convoluted mechanisms of pluralistic online dialogues wherein debates serve more often to resolve differences via ad-hominem insults than to expose differences in rationale and logic (Venkatesh et al). Consider also the constant and withering gaze of the politico-religious establishment on the increasingly dissonant integration of refugee minorities in occidental society, and the jarring contradictions offered by their unflagging support of the politics of multiculturalism which have contributed largely to the ghettoization of said minorities. Finally, what better predictor of the ghastly outcome of post-capitalism than the constantly fluctuating financial systems which have preceded

demises in physical embodiments of society, such as bankrupt territories like Puerto Rico, and zombified industrial resurrections, such as the necrosis that is the City of Detroit, where the collapse of the automobile manufacturing sector in the 2013 was unironically mocked, derided and inversely mirrored in Diego Rivera's larger-than-life Detroit Industry murals, which remained—throughout the bankruptcy period—and remain to this day, gloriously on display at the Detroit Institute of Arts, somehow mocking the broken city they represent? Therefore, in an era of post web-2.0, our conception of necrophilic empathy is characterized primarily by a narcissistic indignation and a solipsistic righteousness that judges any and all transgressions—moral, ethical, legal, political or otherwise—with a myopic lens that secretly cheers on the creation of fiscal mechanisms that feed neo-liberal labels like “twenty-first-century knowledge workers,” but is quick to decry pluralism as soon as paradigms of scientific and cultural thinking are challenged by libertarian philosophies that stretch across the spectrum of political thought (Wolin). We therefore wish to build on Castillo and Egginton's work which refers to these almost algorithmic, siloed communities as “individual fundamentalisms” made possible and expanded by an “inflationary media” to reconceive a deadened empathy, one that manifests itself in the vapidness of non-criticality in the technologically opaque netherworlds of the post web-2.0. For the death of thinking is probably the ultimate death of death, and necrophilic empathy encourages precisely such thoughtlessness and the building of shields which choke out any kind of discussion of differences in viewpoints. Necrophilic empathy encourages the post-modern notion that the solidarity of communities is easily taken for granted and can easily be destroyed by encouraging pluralistic solipsism, that is to say, the differences in perspectives of community members can be easily manipulated to shake the foundation of the goals of the collective.

Taken as a means to describe the indifference between society's stakeholders, necrophilic empathy allows the audience of Cervantes's *La Numancia*—who have broken through the “fourth wall”—to both judge the State as a powerful actor, meting out justice against a prescribed set of laws with the ultimate goal of extinguishing unsavory elements that do not contribute to its advancement, and to look on indifferently at the violent bloodbath meted out by Numantines on their own kin as a vehicle for principles of radical democracy to seek out its agonistic roots. For the hyperreal (à la Baudrillard) mechanisms that the post-modern reader employs presume a navigation between a senseless death brought by a forced starvation and a suicidal slaughter alongside the alternative of succumbing to a subjugation under a larger-than-life patriarchy. Baudrillard's framework of hyperreality enables us to exhibit necrophilic empathy to empower the Numantines as capable of re-imagining their future and controlling their destiny in the face of the effects of a forced

starvation by Scipio. The virtuality of the ultimate freedom from life is mired in the reality of a besieged city whose only other option is to succumb to the State. The decision to die is but a natural, logical, and rational extension of the ultimate outcome of the starvation, and does not need Roman intervention to succeed; in fact, the act of a collective suicide as proposed by the womenfolk of Numancia lends a selfishly nonchalant air of finality rather than one of sympathy. For it is not too far-fetched to consider that the women expected their call to death by starvation to be abdicated by the menfolk and re-imagined by these latter as a call to slaughter, as it is the men who turn their weapons unto their women, children, and ultimately themselves. This framework of hyperreality must also, in turn, help us empathise with Scipio, and by extension the presumption of the Romans to succeed in ruling over Numancia; the imaginary that the Roman State grapples with is, in fact, the dream of a unified nation which brings into the collective fold rogue parties such as the Numantines. Our reading of Cervantes's *La Numancia* does not presume the guilt of Scipio as an architect of the Numantine's demise, rather it exposes his child-like innocence, re-formulated as a machismo and bravado, that meets its match in the stark, asexual, and selfless hyperviolence that the State catalyses in the besieged citizens of Numancia. Whereas we are asked to revel at the camaraderie between Leoncio and Marandro and to consider it representative of the tightly-knit solidarity of Numantine society, their sacrifice to retrieve a piece of bread for Lira leaves her unimpressed, as her preoccupation is less with her hunger than it is with their breach in protecting the sanctity of their brotherhood. That is to say, that Leoncio's and Marandro's deaths reify Lira's hunger in a far more evocative fashion than Lira's own refusal to share of Marandro's prized and bloodied bread.

Last but not least, the re-imagination of Numantine women's use of starvation as a fierce reprisal against the State's consistently punishing patriarchy juxtaposed against the emotionally immaturity of Numantine menfolk—who are unable to form a united front against Scipio and his army—is starkly refreshing. This is because, on the one hand, Cervantes provides a framework which empowers the matriarch and reflects on the concept of womanhood—both as lover and as mother—as a vulnerable position in societal structures, with their physical frailty mirrored against their conviction to resist subjugation. And then, on the other hand, the women characters in the play expose the lack of reflexivity and critical thought amongst not only Numantine men, as they stray from the scripted suicide of their society, but also Scipio and the Roman army, whose fixation on usurpation of power from the Numantine locals blinds them to the emasculating power of the plebiscites, and eventually renders them castrated in face of a self-destructive uprising.

Coda

We would like to conclude this essay by asking the question: what agency does *La Numancia* possess in transmitting a philosophical or even ideological reflection of humanism? And, given the three distinct analyses painted by our tripartite group—from the reference points of Spanish literature, psychoanalysis, and popular culture—how useful is it to attempt tying these pieces together? Rather than thread the needle with a rather thick set of threads, we attempt to answer the question of agency by drawing from the work of Norwegian author, publisher, and musician Jørn Henrik Sværen, whose works both repossess and yearn for the interpretive exercise of mindful and engaged reflection—as is evident from his essay “Dear Jenny” from 2017’s collection *Queen of England*—thereby helping re-cast lessons from classic literature for a modern audience. In his insert piece in a 2015 edition of British literary journal *Snow*, Sværen ruminates on the role of the *riza*—a protective metal mould to cover paintings of religious icons which is often pierced to expose face and hands and other portions of skin—in both revealing and obfuscating the essence of veneration. The juxtaposition of the material concept of *riza* as a shield to protect religion, as well as its opacity as an object that on the one hand exposes the tenderness of the saint’s or the icon’s skin, and yet barely reveals the sculpted form of the deities upon which the iron impressions are made, evoke metaphors of censure, gendered or otherwise. That is to say, *riza* forces the gazes of the consumers of the art depicting the icon on a specific portion of the human form, while teasing them to re-create what lies beneath the clothes. Certainly, the gilded and bejeweled nature of some *rizas* provides a proxy for the decorations depicted in the clothes worn by the icons in the actual paintings. However, the ability of *riza* to hide what is even more sacred than the flesh of the icon provides a hyperreal interpretative framework within which to frame the necrophilic empathy we observe in *La Numancia*. What if the *riza* is reified as the Numantine matriarchy—a singular shield against the patriarchy imposed by the Romans, and a carefully crafted shelter for both the women and the children from the insipidity of the Numantine males? Herein the *riza* supports our assertion that the Numantine matriarchy is an embodiment of veneration and that the shield functions to repel the throttling siege imposed by Scipio and his troops—for the refusal of the Numantine women to succumb to the inhumane treatment imposed by the Romans is a determined display of strength, and the *riza* serves to protect the inherent beauty of the willpower of the woman. But the *riza* also accomplishes a second feat

in the case of the Numantine women in that its pierced state exposes the vulnerability of the matriarch. Somehow this seemingly porous nature of the *riza* gives us an opportunity to reveal a singular focus of the Numantine women not to allow their society to be usurped by the Roman aggressors. What lies beneath the hardened exterior of the matriarchy is not necessarily a loving, gentle, and caressing nature, but rather a cold, misanthropic, nihilistic view that if freedom is taken away from their society, then the final act of the Numantine women is a painstakingly drawn-out and publically executed self-annihilation. Even in the face of hunger and starvation, the matriarch's pierced *riza* reveals an inherent fascination with its own demise. What lies beneath the *riza* is as much the beauty of humanistic interpretations of the need to strive for social equity and harmony, as well as the horror of the oft-suppressed fascination with the singular finality of death as a release from the horrors of the machinations of society.

Notes

1. See Baena and Nelson.
2. The rapidity, severity, and extent of these measures matches Rodolfo Walsh's characterization of the Argentine military *junta*'s austerity program of "planned misery," implemented after the 1976 *golpe de estado* with the help of "experts" from the so-called Chicago Boys, economists influenced by the neo-Liberal economic philosophy of Milton Friedman, professor at the University of Chicago (cited in Klein, *The Shock Doctrine* Kindle 1735).
3. See in particular Francisco Vívar's *La Numancia de Cervantes y la memoria de un mito*.
4. See Moisés Castillo's *Indios en escena* for a brilliant analysis of the theological-juridical framework that informed the *comedia de indios* in baroque Spain.
5. See "Calderón's *Aurora en Copacabana*: A Scandalous Reading."
6. In Zygmunt Bauman's *Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts*, the author cites two well-known politicians who oversaw incredibly violent erasures of indigenous populations in North and South America: "And so, for instance, Theodore Roosevelt represented the extermination of American Indians as a selfless service to the cause of civilization: 'The settler and pioneer have at bottom had justice on their side: this great continent could not have been kept as nothing but a game preserve for squalid savages.' While General Roca, the commander of the infamous episode in Argentinian history euphemistically dubbed 'Conquest of the Desert' but consisting of the 'ethnic cleansing' of the pampas of its Indian population, explained to his fellow countrymen that their self-respect obliged them 'to put down as soon as possible, by reason or by force, this handful of savages who destroy our wealth and prevent us from definitely occupying, in

the name of law, progress and our own security, the richest and most fertile lands of the Republic” (38).

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