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Title

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Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4zd9x4n1>

Journal

Aleph, UCLA Undergraduate Research Journal for the Humanities and Social Sciences, 10(0)

ISSN

2639-6440

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Publication Date

2013

DOI

10.5070/L6101040232

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*Cervantes' El Cerco de
Numancia: An Argument
Based on Blood Based
Determination of
Hispanidad*

Diane Bani-Esraili

I. Introduction and Statement of Purpose

As is typical of neo-Senecan drama, Miguel de Cervantes's *El cerco de Numancia* (1582) is marked by mass brutality, bloodshed, and death. Cervantes portrays bodily suffering throughout the work—from the image of a baby suckling blood from his mother's gaunt breast, to the scene of a father killing his helplessly compliant wife and children before going on to kill himself, to the play's climax when the victorious Roman troops penetrate Numantia's walls only to see every last Numantine enemy already dead and the city engulfed in "un rojo lago"¹ of blood.

Blood pervades Numancia; indeed, it is the principal trope. In Cervantes's Spain blood held multiple meanings and associations. This paper will discuss those different meanings and associations and, thereby, establish the centrality of the role of blood in early modern Spanish society.

Based on that foundation, this paper will go on to explain how Cervantes uses the legendary point of origin of the Spanish nation—the siege of Numantia during the Roman conquest of the Iberian Peninsula in the second century BCE—to reevaluate the relationship between blood and hispanidad.

Through his play Cervantes discredits the prevalent notion of his time that *limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood) is the determinant of hispanidad. This paper will demonstrate that while he discredits *limpieza de sangre* as the determinant of hispanidad, he still maintains that one's "Spanishness" is a quality 'of the blood.' This paper will illuminate Cervantes's embedded proposition that it is Holy Blood or sacramental embodiment of the Eucharist that is the true, and only true, link Spaniards can claim to their Numantine forefathers. The intent is to expound on Cervantes's argument that it is Holy Blood—voluntary, Christian action—rather than purity of blood—predetermined accident of birth—that determines hispanidad.

II. Historical Context and Discourses of Blood

It is important to understand the social and religious historical context by which Cervantes was influenced and from which Numancia and its anti-mainstream argument about blood and hispanidad emerge.² During Cervantes's time, blood played a central role in both social and religious arenas (which, by nature, often overlap) and multiple and simultaneous discourses of blood existed.

a) Vertical Hierarchy Spanish society during the early modern period was organized just as all other European societies were—as a pyramid. There was a definite vertical hierarchy. From the base of the pyramid, working up to the pinnacle there were: peasants, commoners, nobility and clergy (on about the same level), and finally the monarch who represented the authority of God Himself on earth. In other words, society was divided into those who have and those who have not.³

b) Alta sangre The first, the most antique, and thus the most deeply rooted and foundational discourse of blood during Cervantes's time had to do with royal and noble bloodlines. Shared royal and noble bloodlines determined and justified the ruling oligarchies of early modern Europe. Moreover, it was this discussion on ancestry or blood relations that differentiated the aristocracy from the peasantry. The distinguished ruling class was of alta sangre (high blood) and was charged with the responsibility of defending their people and lands from enemies, engaging in battle to do so if necessary.⁴

c) Horizontal Hierarchy of the Middle Ages and its Obliteration Spanish society of the Middle Ages (which ended mid fifteenth century, before Cervantes's time) was unique to the rest of European society in that in addition to a vertical division of society, it featured a "simultaneous horizontal division of society into three ethnic-religious groups called castas or castes: Christians, Muslims, and

Jews".⁵ While other European monarchs were 'Defenders of the Faith' (that is, expressly the Christian faith), the king of Castile was known as 'King of the Three Religions.'⁶ Indeed, Iberia of the Middle Ages was inhabited by a large and diverse Semitic population.

This three-way horizontal division of society did not extend into the sixteenth century; it was obliterated under the Catholic monarchs. In 1492, Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabela of Castile executed the conquest of the kingdom of Granada and forced all the Moors to convert. The Jews were given a choice- be Jewish or be Spanish. In other words, they were given the choice between conversion and exile. With respect to religion, Spanish society quite abruptly went from pluralistic (albeit divided) to monolithic. Catholicism became the mandatory state religion; religious uniformity was decreed.

This compulsory conversion and resultant religious uniformity in early modern Spanish society wrought great anxiety in terms of what the incorporation of ex-Jews and Muslims into the Christian majority might mean. By the 1580s, when Cervantes was writing the Jewish and

Moorish communities had already been converted to Catholicism for a century and half a century, respectively. Once the long-standing faith-based social divisions were removed, the minority populations threatened to blend in with the majority. The ex-Jews and Muslims of Iberia had lost much of their unique characteristics; they no longer dressed differently, they no longer had distinct dietary laws, they no longer lived apart from the majority, and they no longer worshiped in separate domains. Moreover, phenotypic differences were not distinct enough to reliably differentiate people.

d) Limpieza de sangre The fact that social divisions were no longer based on religious belief, that there was no longer a defined horizontal hierarchy, prompted the need for a redefinition of orthodoxy and social privilege based on some other defining factor.⁷ It is for this reason that in the sixteenth century, blood took on an additional meaning. So-called 'purity of blood' came to be associated with social position, namely through the *estatutos de limpieza de sangre*. It was in this context of the gradual

dissemination of blood purity laws that Cervantes produced *Numancia*, which is a written meditation on the link between blood and the claim to nationhood.

Early modern Spanish society was partitioned into the 'superiors' and the 'inferiors' based not on their current religious beliefs and practices (as previously), but rather based on their genealogies. In other words, this partition and gradation of society was based on whether one was of *sangre pura* o *sangre manchada* (pure or stained blood) according to their recorded lineage. The *cristianos viejos* (Old Christians) who could trace back their Christian ancestry to time immemorial were the 'superiors' of society, while the *cristianos nuevos* (New Christians) whose *converso* or *morisco* ancestors' conversions (from Judaism or Islam) was "still a living memory, even if several generations had passed,"⁸ were the 'inferiors' of society.

These *estatutos de limpieza de sangre* were essentially the first discriminatory 'race' laws and it was blood that was used as the marker of 'difference' in Spanish society. New Christians were [systematically] excluded from positions of power and influence, and the centers of power were firmly in the control of the Old Christian majority."⁹ One example of this superiority-inferiority complex at play is that New Christians were often pushed into the professions their Jewish and Muslim ancestors practiced before. Moreover, though these descendents of Jews and Muslims and were themselves technically Christians, they were "shunned by Old Christians because of their traditional associations. The Jewish merchant became the *converso* merchant...[and] Old Christians generally stayed out of business because, to them, being a merchant meant being Jewish."¹⁰

Legally and bureaucratically, marginalization based on religion and bloodline was an integral part of the Spanish social landscape of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As Johnson puts it, "society was divided racially, into a 'pure' majority, which held power, and as 'impure' minority,"¹¹ which was excluded *de jure* by the statutes, and *de facto* by popular prejudice.

The fact that the element of blood was used to create difference in Spanish society indicates that, lacking extrinsic or phenotypic

indicators of 'race,' Spanish society was propelled to adopt a physiological element as a social marker. Blood was a strategic choice for a marker, as it suggested an innate, inextricable, and—most importantly—inherited difference between the *cristianos viejos* and *cristianos nuevos*. Again, the key shift to notice here is that social division went from being predicated on religion to being predicated on bloodline. *Cristianos nuevos* inferiority was established as corporeal and inextricably 'in their blood.'

e) Contestation of the Doctrine of Purity of Blood But just how accepted and widespread was the Doctrine of Purity of Blood? How and to what extent were the *estatutos de limpieza de sangre* actually instituted? According to Burk, "the adoption of blood purity statutes was neither uniform nor homogenous."¹² The *estatutos de limpieza de sangre* were "first implemented in 1449 in the Cathedral of Toledo, but they appeared unsystematically and spread in a gradual, piecemeal process throughout Iberia."¹³ This unsystematic and gradual spread indicates two things: first, that authority and power in early modern Iberia was not centralized, but rather diffuse in nature and, two, that there must have been a level of debate that the concept of and legislation concerning *limpieza* brought about.

Religious brotherhoods, churches, universities, city governments, and other institutions would establish their own policies on purity of blood, as well. They would make membership exclusive to those who were of pure blood. The Inquisition is a prime example of a prominent institution with this set of requisites to earning a position. While requirements for purity of blood were left unenforced or were even contested in some cases, the Doctrine of Purity of Blood was by and large saturated Iberia well through the sixteenth century and into the seventeenth century.

As was touched on earlier, the Doctrine of Purity of Blood was definitely on the rise during the time that Cervantes was writing *Numancia*. That is not to say, however, that it was never contested. On the contrary, the doctrine provoked a contentious discourse among *cristianos viejos*, as well as among *cristianos nuevos* during the sixteenth century.

Alfonso de Cartagena is an example of a prominent figure involved in this debate. In his *Defensorium Unitatis Christianae* (A Defense of Christian Unity), written in 1450, he argues that the Doctrine of Purity of Blood completely clashes with long-held notions of Christian community and basically discredits altogether the practice of baptism to bring in those new to Christianity.¹⁴ Essentially, his work is an apology of sorts to the *cristianos nuevos*.

Alfonso de Cartagena was not the only one to contest the doctrine; many New and Old Christians, alike, welcomed members of former religious minorities into their religious majority. Another one among them was Ignatius of Loyola. Ignatius of Loyola refused to consider *limpieza de sangre* as a requisite to entering into the Jesuit order.¹⁵ In his *Numancia*, Cervantes—like Alfonso de Cartagena and Ignatius of Loyola—takes on an anti-*limpieza de sangre* tone in his *Numancia*, one that is also very much in line with the Erasmian humanism. This Erasmian influence will be discussed at length in a later chapter.

f) The Religious Discourse of Blood Another discourse of blood arose during Cervantes's time, one to do with religion. Namely, this was the discourse on the Eucharist and the doctrine of transubstantiation. This discourse played a vital role in the Counter-Reformation, in which the Hapsburg dynasty (which had dominion over Spanish lands) was the primary ally and endorser of the Catholic Church. In response to the Reformation's contestation, the Council of Trent (1545-1563) reaffirmed the Catholic Church's position on the nature of the Eucharist (among other things). The Council of Trent pronounced that the bread and wine of the Eucharist

were the literal body and blood of Christ. It is written in Canons and Decrees 78: "by the consecration of the bread and of the wine, a conversion is made of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord, and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of His blood."¹⁶ Thus, after consecration and consumption, Christ was—in a literal sense—present in the consumer's body. It is the acceptance of the Doctrine of Transubstantiation that allows for the sacramental embodiment of the Eucharist, which Cervantes argues is the only way to reach Spain's Numantine ancestors and, thus, to claim authentic *hispanidad*.

g) The Correlation Between Sacrifice and Bloodshed At the core of the Doctrine of Transubstantiation and of the concept of the Eucharist is that Christ brings life through his death. In other words, Christ performed a sacrifice, namely he shed blood on the cross, in order that his children may receive salvation through consumption of the consecrated wine and bread of the Eucharist. It was this practice that separated Christians from non-Christians and served as a foundation for the Christian community. Cervantes works within the religious model of the Eucharist to show that incorporation and identity—namely, in terms of hispanidad—have to do with voluntary sacrifice rather than bloodline.

This explication of the multiple and simultaneous social and religious discourses of blood that existed in Cervantes's day should make it abundantly clear that blood held unequivocal and inextricable centrality and status. In keeping with his contemporary social climate, Cervantes makes blood the primary trope in *Numancia*, inserting it "on multiple fronts as a material reality with symbolic functions."¹⁷ By doing so, Cervantes maintains that blood is indeed a determinant of hispanidad, but delivers his argument that it acts as such only in terms of voluntary and conscious embodiment and not in terms of heredity.

III. What Numancia is All About and its Conduciveness to Cervantes's Argument

Cervantes revisits the legend of the Spanish nation's origins, the legend of the historic siege of Numantia, because it allows him to reevaluate the link between blood and nationhood, specifically hispanidad. It is important to know what *El cerco de Numancia* is all about in order to understand how it conducive to Cervantes's anti-mainstream argument that Holy Blood, rather than purity of blood, is the true determinant of "Spanishness."

a) Acts I-II The play is set at the siege of Numantia, which actually occurred in 134 BCE, and is divided into two acts or jornadas ("days"). In the first act of *Numancia*, Scipio enters with generals from the Roman camp looking to take Numantia. He explains that

the Roman Senate has sent him to finish the task of a war that has dragged on for years. After Scipio's harsh reprimand, the previously distracted Roman soldiers are once again put into a martial mood. Scipio's strategy refuses negotiation with Numantine ambassadors for peace and instead involves starving the inhabitants of Numantia by cutting them off from all contact and communication with the outside world. España grieves Numantia's desperate plight, summoning the river Duero on whose banks Numantia stands. The river god appears along with an entourage of related deities and delivers a speech on Numantine history. This speech has often been interpreted as a moment of foreshadowed promise of the future Spanish empire (which at the time Cervantes was writing Numantia was at a height).¹⁸

In the second act, the scene is transferred to Numantia, namely at the sight of a Numantine council. The council is deliberating on the current situation of the city. Several solutions are proposed. The first option is that the Numantines invite the Romans to wager the outcome of the war on a single battle between one Roman and one Numantine. The second option is that of age and able men attack the Romans by night, hoping that they will surpass the besiegers' fortified line. The third option is that Marquino, the Numantine soothsayer attempt to tap into what the future held for Numantia. Finally, the fourth option is that they, the Numantines, make a sacrifice to Jupiter in exchange for Jupiter's reversing their plight and doom. Options three and four are enacted, but are not successful.

b) Acts III-IV and the Introduction of the Theme of Self-Sacrifice In Act III of Numantia, option one (to base the outcome of the entire war on a single one-on-one battle) is rejected by the Roman leader, Scipio. Also, the Numantine women convince the fighting-age men not to go forth with a night incursion across the besiegers' ditch. With all four options exhausted or rejected, the Numantine leader, Teogenes, orders all the city's inhabitants to burn their possessions, put their wives and children to death, throw themselves into the flames or joust each other to the death, lest any Numantine become a Roman slave or die at the hands of the enemy. For the most part a unified, patriotic misery ensues. Marandro is the exception in that

he, accompanied with his friend Leonicio attempt to enter the enemy encampment to secure some bread for his love, Lira.

In Act IV, Marandro comes back with a piece of bread soaked in Leonicio's blood and gives it to his starving beloved. Leonicio has died and Marandro, mortally wounded, falls at Lira's feet and dies. This scene contains the theme of sacrifice¹⁹ and will be examined further later in the paper.

Next, self-sacrifice on a much larger, citywide scale ensues in accordance with Teogenes's orders. Through self-sacrifice, Numantia robs the Romans of their victory. The Roman scout, Mario, enters Numantia just as Teogenes thrusts himself onto a bonfire. Mario returns to his camp with the news that every last Numantine is already dead and that they have prevented the pillaging of their city, also by means burnt 'offering.' Jugurta notifies Scipio that, actually, one Numantine boy remains alive. The capture of this boy, Bariato, would have been enough for Scipio and the Romans to say that they had triumphed over the Numantines. Remorseful of his cowardice, Bariato finally leaps from the tower where he hid from the decree that all should die. Bariato explains just before he leaps from the tower to his self-inflicted death, that his motivation is "el amor perfecto y puro/que yo tuve a mi patria tan querida."²⁰ He invokes patriotic fervor as if it were Christian love—a climactic declaration totally conducive to Cervantes's hisanidad through Holy Blood argument.

At this point, Scipio admits defeat on behalf of the Romans and even lauds Bariato's heroism. The play ends with Fama ("Fame") appearing on stage to declare that she will sing of Numantia's valor and the future glory of Spain. This allegorical figure foretells that a great power will rise out of the ashes of Numantia like a phoenix.

c) *Life Through Death* Much of the play revolves around the Numantines' desperate attempts to find a way out of their plight and escape death at the hands of the Romans. In other words, much of the play "is concerned with the Numantines' attempts to find a way to life."²¹

*O sea por el foso o por la muerte,
de abrir tenemos paso a nuestra vida:
que es dolor isufrible el de la muerte,
si llega uando más vive la vida.
Remedio a las miserias es la muerte,
si se acrecientan ellas con la vida,
y suele tanto más ser excelente
cuanto se muere más honradamente.²²*

Ultimately, the Numantines do not attain life “por el foso” (through escape), but rather “por la muerte” (through death), which “itself is a “camino” to life after death.”²³ As counterintuitive as it might sound, the Numantine clench onto life by means of death and will ‘live on’ in the way that Fama—whose own very name refers to legacy and fame—proclaims. They die nobly so that at least their lives will be preserved in fame. It is important to note that the Numantines begin seeking to preserve their lives in a physical sense and then their goals, uniformly and in sync, shift to seeking to preserve their lives in a spiritual sense.

d) The Vice of Disunity and the Sole Remedy of Self-Sacrifice In Cervantes’s reading of the siege of Numantia, Numantia’s role, as destiny has it, is to expiate Spain for its past disunity. In his play, Cervantes casts the Numantines as representatives of the Spanish people who will do penance for the vice of disunity. The allegorical character of España elucidates this vice and how it has brought upon Numantia such woes:

*Con justísimo título se emplea
en mí el rigor de tantas penas fieras,
pues mis famosos hijos y valientes
andan entre sí mismos diferentes...
y así con sus discordias convidaron
los bárbaros de pechos codiciosos
a venir a entregarse en mis riquezas,
usando en mí en el ellos mil crueltas.²⁴*

Essentially, what Numantia must do is act as Spain's Christ; it must sacrifice itself for Spain in the way that Christ sacrificed himself for all humanity. As is evidenced by the failure of the first three actions Numantia took to reverse their misfortune, nothing short of complete self-sacrifice was sufficient for redemption. When the heifer was being offered to Jupiter, the offering did not burn. In the case of the proposed one-on-one battle, Scipio rejected the offer. When it came to the able-bodied men risking their lives in a nighttime sally, the women of Numantia persuaded them not to execute. Interestingly, these three attempts involved an increasingly higher sacrifice—from that of a heifer, to a single Numantine, to all able-bodied, fighting-aged Numantines. Still, these plans failed. It is not until Teogenes's decree of total, citywide material and human self-sacrifice that a Numantine strategy is actually successfully carried out and, moreover, successfully yields the desired result.

It should also be noted that not only does Teogenes issue the decree, but also he, himself, follows it. After he kills his family in the temple of Diana, he throws himself to the flames. Thus, it can be interpreted that this solution is successful because it is not just sacrifice—rather, it is willed and voluntary self-sacrifice.

As the following quote from Bariato shows, that despite his rebellious impulse, he will not surrender to Scipio. The quote indicates that

Bariato, the only outlier to the unanimous self-sacrifice, too, will ultimately incorporate himself.

*Todo el furor de cuantos ya son muertos
en este pueblo, en polvo reducido,
todo el huir los pactos y conciertos,
ni el dar a sujeción jamás oídos,
sus iras, sus rencores descubiertos,
está en mi pecho solamente unido.
Yo heredé de Numancia todo el brío.
Ved, si pensáis vencerme, es desvarío.*²⁵

This perfect accord, which manifests in completely unanimous self-sacrifice brings the Numantines their salvation, albeit through death. Were it not for this all-encompassing will and allegiance, were it not for total incorporation Numantia would not have, as Schevill and Bonilla put it, “expiate[d] the Spanish sin of disunity.”²⁶

e) Invalidating the Genealogical Link to Numantine ‘Forefathers’
As was touched on earlier, Cervantes is clever in his choice to base his play on Spain’s foundational myth. By doing so, he is able to encase his counterargument to hispanidad through purity of blood in a deeply rooted, traditional origin story to which the opposing mainstream certainly subscribes.²⁷ Even if Cervantes’s argument of hispanidad through Holy Blood were completely without merit, the opposing camp’s case completely topples on its own with the very presentation of the legend of Numantia. This legend completely invalidates the idea that hispanidad is a matter of genealogy, as it culminates in the death of every last Numantine. Therefore, how could the uncontested Numantine forefathers of

Spain have passed their 'pure blood' to those who currently claim their hispanidad through limpieza de sangre? If it is universally accepted that "Numantia fathers Spain...[then] inheritance cannot be a bloodline."²⁸ It would therefore behoove those for the purity of blood argument of hispanidad to reconsider the rigidity of their stance.

IV. Blood Rites in Numancia, the Eucharist, and Defining Spanish Nationhood

Instead of reinforcing the conventional tie between the legend and the present as an ancestral tie, Cervantes posits a Christian model of the nation and its inherited salvation. He does so by installing blood rites in Numantia that reflect the consumption and embodiment involved in the Eucharist. This is a successful tactic, because Cervantes writes just as the Castilian monarchy is vigorously attempting to define the Spanish nation, namely as a distinctly and devoutly Christian one. Numantia's scenes of Eucharistic blood rites send the message that transmission of Numantia's victory and salvation to Spain, indeed belonging to the same nation, is only possible through perpetuated Eucharistic action.

Cervantes suggests a Christian paradigm of national salvation through self-sacrifice by structuring his play around several self-sacrificial and pseudo-Eucharistic rites. It is important to keep in mind that both the Numantines and the Romans in Cervantes's work display monotheistic paganism. Just as the Numantines are the accepted predecessors of the Spanish, this monotheistic pagan practice is the precursor to Christian religious practice. The series of blood rites (mostly performed by the Numantines) reference the Eucharist in their use of oaths, sacrifice, and ritual consumption. The next chapter will outline a few textual examples of this.

a) *The Sacrifice to Jupiter* The first example of a Numantine-enacted blood rite in the play is when Numantine priests sacrifice a ram to the deity Jupiter. They do so specifically in the hopes of bringing an end to the siege of Numantia and all the suffering attached to

it. Cervantes includes specific directions for this blood rite in his play. He enumerates the priests' special dress, as well as the other accoutrements of the sacrifice—the altar, incense, wine, and water. These elements alone are reminiscent of the Christian rite they are referencing. The priests refer to Jupiter as “eterno padre inmenso” and make declarations of repentance and submission to him.

*Sacerdote 2: ...que la oblación mejor y la primera
que se debe ofrecer al alto cielo,
es alma limpia y voluntad sincera.*²⁹

These words—“alma limpia” and “voluntad sincera,” in particular—are evocative of the Christian virtue of purity of soul and sincere will vis-à-vis the eternal great father, Jesus (as opposed to Jupiter). This codified language indicates an oath, a token of sacred fealty, which also runs parallel to the Christian tradition. Thus, in ritual ornaments and oath, this blood rite parallels the Eucharist.

The sacrifice to Jupiter by nature involves blood; it is a blood sacrifice of an animal. The priests kill the ram in order to—in an act of magical thinking—bring about the slaying of their

Roman enemies. In the following lines, it is evident that the priest is directing his comments towards his knife with the belief that it is the tool that will shed the ram's blood and thus create a sanctified domain in which the priests (who speak on behalf of Numantia) will have their request granted.

*Sacerdote 1: Y así como te baño y ensangriento este cuchillo
en esta sangre pura, con alma limpia y limpio pensamiento,
así la tierra de Numancia dura se bañe con la sangre de
romanos, y aun los sirva también de sepultura.*³⁰

This sacrifice ultimately fails to reverse Numantia's lot. At its founding, Christianity counteracted pagan sacrifice by proposing that the only legitimate form of sacrifice is that of self-sacrifice. Consistent with Christian belief, this self-serving sacrifice was unsuccessful, for it was a tainted form of wish-enactment. Though it incorporated aspects of the Eucharist, it did so to misguided ends; it was a so-called 'mishandling of blood.'

b) *Marandro's Sacrifice: Blood, Bread, and Body* The second example of a sacrificial blood rite is that of Marandro's stealing bread for his love, Lira. Conditions in Numantia are dire and the city's inhabitants are on the brink of starvation with the siege ongoing. Marandro sees that his love Lira is starving, about to die, and decides to risk his life by venturing into the Roman camp to retrieve some good. His friend, Leonicio, tries to convince him to abort the mission, but seeing that there is no dissuading Marandro decides to join him on this suicidal mission. Only Marandro makes it back alive, albeit mortally wounded. He delivers Lira some bread.

Marandro: ...dando a mi dulce Lira

este tan amargo pan,

pan Ganado de emenifos,

pero no ha sido Ganado

sino con sangre comprado

de dos sin ventura amigos.

Lira's bread was not stolen, but rather bought with blood. It cost the lives and blood of two young men. Lying in Lira's arms after the delivery, Marandro begs her to eat the bread soaked in his blood. Marandro's following bid is an explicit evocation of Christ's sacrifice and the Church's sacrament:

Lira: ¿Qué dices, Marandro amado?

*Marandro: Lira, que acates la hambre
entre tanto que la estambre
de mi vida corta el hado;
pero mi sangre vertida
y con este pan mezclada,
te ha de dar, mi dulce amada,
triste y amarga comida.³¹*

Lira must consume the "triste y amarga" bread to justify Marandro's Christ-like, loving act of self-sacrifice performed on her behalf. The echo reverberates as Marandro goes on to address Lira much in the same way as Christ addressed his disciples at the Last Supper:

*Marandro: Y pues en tormenta y calma
siempre has sido mi señora,
¡recibe este cuerpo agora,
como recibiste el alma!*

Marandro gives Lira his life in the form of his actual body at the same time as he gives her his life in the form of the bread that he risked his life for so that it would save hers. Thus, in this scene of blood rite, Cervantes conflates the two terms of body and bread, evoking again—and perhaps in the most explicit way within the play—the Eucharist.

This blood rite is an improvement on the priests' understanding of valid blood rite performance, for it entails love coupled with sacrifice, a combination that approaches the divine. This sacrifice for love is true in two ways: first, Marandro for Lira, and second, Leonicio for Marandro. This is an intermediate stage in the progression toward total self-sacrifice and salvation in the play, because Lira has not sacrificed. She survives, however, to participate in the communal auto-sacrifice at the climax of the play, which is the ultimate salvation of Numantia.

c) *Abstention from Food* As the play progresses, the blood rites intensify and sacrifice increasingly near the ultimate expression of self-sacrifice. The blood rituals are not completely, if at all, effective at first. They do, however, build up to a successful *imitatio crucis* in the cathartic communal bloodletting of the last act of the play. Leading up to this climactic act of Holy Blood, hunger and starvation permeate Numantia. Hunger plays a key role in terms of the rite of holy consumption. Namely, the truly pious abstain from eating normal meals in preparation for sacred eating of the Eucharist—that is, becoming Christ. Walker Bynum explains that abstention from eating was done as a group practice for the purpose of purification pre-Eucharistic consumption. She explicates its importance as “a recapitulation of as well as a preparation for the Eucharistic sacrifice. By fasting, the Christian joined with Christ who, in the garden and on the cross, kept the rule of abstinence that Adam had violated in paradise and became himself sacrificial food, propitiating God and saving sinners.”³² While Numantia was not electing to abstain from eating, but rather forced to fast due to circumstance, the parallel is undeniable: the Numantines' individual suffering, unwilling as it may be, eventually turns into group suffering, a community-wide spiritual and self-sacrificial impulse. Ultimately, this

spiritual and collective self-sacrifice leads to 'life through death,' victory and salvation, for the Numantines.

d) Consumption and Incorporation Ultimately, Cervantes's play proposes that in order to claim Numantia as its founder and point of inception, it is necessarily incumbent upon Spain to create a community, to create an incorporative nationhood through the practice of blood—sacramental rite, the Eucharist—as opposed to the birthright of blood.

It has already been explained how the Eucharist is a practice of blood in the context of Cervantes's contemporary Spain (the wine being the blood and the bread being the body or flesh of Christ). Now the question becomes how is the Eucharistic practice of blood 'incorporative' and 'participatory'? According to Caroline Walker Bynum's explanation, the consumption of the transformed or foods as an incarnation of Christ's suffering humanity allows the believer to participate. Holy eating brought about the mystical union of the believer with Christ: "To eat God was to take into ones self the suffering flesh on the cross. To eat God was *imitatio crucis*."³³ Walker Bynum points out the paradoxical nature of this incorporative act. She says that in an act of consumption, in which the individual is the one consuming, he himself is consumed in the sense that he is incorporated into the body of the Church—and, by extension, the nation of Spain—as a participant.

e) Christ's Blood and the Community It is this one by one consumption and incorporation that leads to the Christian community that characterized the Spanish dominion under the Catholic monarchs. As Pope Honorius II elaborated after the Latran Council of 1215, which first tried to solidify Eucharistic doctrine, Christ's blood has significance not just on the individual level, but also on a community-wide level.³⁴ How so? Christ's blood circulated through the veins of believers, uniting them symbolically, as well as materially. The Council of Trent echoed the idea that Christ's blood is integral to community identity building. It pronounced that the Eucharist created a community of practicing believers: "He would fain have

all Christians be mentally joined and united together [through celebrating the Eucharist]."³⁵ Notably, the sanctified bodily state attained through the celebration of the Eucharist was attainable by any and all baptized Christians, irrespective of *limpieza de sangre*.

V. Cervantes's Argument's Erasmian Christian Humanist Streak

It is fitting to bring up Erasmian thought and Christian humanism in this discussion on voluntary and willed determination of hispanidad through Holy Blood. Despite the fact that his texts were banned by the time Cervantes was living, Cervantes was learned and indeed heavily influenced by his ideas of Christian humanism. In *El pensamiento de Cervantes* (1925) Américo Castro pushes the idea that Cervantes's subtle commentary on this topic is largely derivative of Erasmian doctrines. Castro characterizes Cervantes as a man of the Renaissance who "swam easily in the currents of Renaissance humanism and who was heavily influenced by Erasmus."³⁶ So much so, that Castro considers many of Cervantes's works compendia of the ideology of Christian humanism.

Erasmus's Christian humanism appeared in coincidence with the emergence of Spanish society's first generation of conversos and moriscos. Erasmus's *Enchiridion* encapsulated this ideology. The text is essentially a dissertation on Christian piety. In *Enchiridion* Erasmus champions *devotio intima* as opposed to obligatory shows of religiosity. He posits that Christianity should not be based on participation in public events, events at which people are conscious of the fact that their behavior is subject to scrutiny. In other words, acts of religiosity are not meaningful when one's motivations are extrinsic. Christian piety should be based on primarily the Word, the sacred text, and on the inner experience of Divinity, according to Erasmus.³⁷

Christian humanism was quite subversive for its time and continued to be with the rise of the Doctrine of Purity of Blood. After all, a doctrine pronouncing that willed and voluntary practice of Christianity has more weight than any other factor clearly clashes

with the prevailing concept of *limpieza de sangre*. *Limpieza de sangre*, after all, declared that an individual's authenticity as a Christian and, by extension, as a Spaniard is solely determined by bloodline and inheritance, regardless of a person's behavior, actions, and Christian expressions.

VI. Conclusion

Miguel de Cervantes's play, *El cerco de Numancia*, is suffused with blood. Cervantes exploits the blood-laden origin myth of the Spanish nation to deliver his commentary on the link between blood and *hispanidad*. As this paper has established, blood was absolutely central to the determination of the construct of sixteenth century Spanish society and rather than contest its status, Cervantes simply proposes an alternate way of understanding the way in which blood should serve as a social indicator.

Cervantes asserts that there is indeed a blood tie between ancient Numantines and early modern Spaniards, only that bond is sacramental practice rather than lineage. In this framework, incorporating Christ through the Eucharist is a defining patriotic act; it is an act which allows for the inclusion of conversos and moriscos who can be judged on practice rather than ancestry. The patria is not innate; to inherit the legacy of Numantia, those who wish to claim *hispanidad* must repeat their forbearers' sacrificial ethos.

End Notes

¹ Robert Marrast, ed., *Numancia*, (Madrid: Ed. Catédra, 1990), 2218-9.

² Eric Graf, "Urgent Fury. Exemplary Dissent in Cervantes's *La Numancia*: Towards an Ideological Etiology of Quixotic Desire," Unpublished dissertation University of Virginia (1996), 12.

³ Teofilo F. Ruiz, *Spanish Society: 1400-1600*, (Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2001), 39.

⁴ Gil Anidjar, "Lines of Blood: Limpieza de sangre as Political Theology," in *Blood in History and Blood Histories*, ed. Mariacarla Gadebusch Bondio, (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2005), 119-36.

⁵ Carroll B. Johnson, *Don Quixote: The Quest for Modern Fiction*, (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1990), 5.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Deborah Root, "Speaking Christian: Orthodoxy and Difference in Sixteenth-Century Spain," *Representations* 23 (1988): 118-34.

⁸ Rachel L. Burk, "'La patria Consumida': Blood, Nation, and Eucharist in Cervantes's *Numancia*," *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 13.1 (2012): 2.

⁹ Johnson, *Don Quixote: The Quest for Modern Fiction*, 10.

¹⁰ Johnson, *Don Quixote: The Quest for Modern Fiction*, 30.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Burk, "'La patria Consumida': Blood, Nation, and Eucharist in Cervantes's *Numancia*," 3.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Teofilo F. Ruiz, "Limpieza de Sangre" (lecture, University of California, Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA, February 2, 2011).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ The Council of Trent, "The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent," in *The Thirteenth Session*, ed. and trans. J. Waterworth (London: Dolan, 1848), 75-91.

¹⁷ Michel Foucault, *This History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 56.

¹⁸ Francisco Vivar, "El ideal pro patria mori en La Numancia de Cervantes," *Cervantes* 20.2 (2000): 7-30.

¹⁹ William M. Whitby, "The Sacrifice Theme in Cervantes' Numancia," *Hispania*, 45.2 (1962): 205-10.

²⁰ Robert Marrast, ed., *Numancia*, (Madrid: Ed. Catédra, 1990), 2398-9.

²¹ Whitby, "The Sacrifice Theme in Cervantes' Numancia," 206.

²² Robert Marrast, ed., *Numancia*, (Madrid: Ed. Catédra, 1990), 585-92.

²³ Whitby, "The Sacrifice Theme in Cervantes' Numancia," 206.

²⁴ Robert Marrast, ed., *Numancia*, (Madrid: Ed. Catédra, 1990), 373-80.

²⁵ Robert Marrast, ed., *Numancia*, (Madrid: Ed. Catédra, 1990), 1733-40.

²⁶ Rudolph Schevill and Adolfo Bonilla, *Obras completas de Miguel de Cevantes Saavedra*. (Madrid: Imprenta de Bernardo Rodríguez, 1919), 41.

²⁷ George Shivers, "La historicidad de El cerco de Numancia," *Hispanófila* 39 (1970): 1-12.

²⁸ Burk, "'La patria Consumida': Blood, Nation, and Eucharist in Cervantes's Numancia," 10.

²⁹ Robert Marrast, ed., *Numancia*, (Madrid: Ed. Catédra, 1990), 801-3.

³⁰ Robert Marrast, ed., *Numancia*, (Madrid: Ed. Catédra, 1990), 879-84.

³¹ Robert Marrast, ed., *Numancia*, (Madrid: Ed. Catédra, 1990), 1831-38.

³² Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 35.

³³ Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, 67.

³⁴ Teofilo F. Ruiz, "The Fourth Latran Council" (lecture, University of California, Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA, March 9, 2011).

³⁵ Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, 67.

³⁶ Américo Castro, *El pensamiento de Cervantes*, (Barcelona: Editorial Crítica, 1987), 12.

³⁷ Erika Rummel, *Erasmus (Outstanding Christian Thinkers)* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006), 14.

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