

Surrounded by “Barbarians”: Scipio Aemilianus, García Hurtado de Mendoza and Spanish Imperialism in *La Numancia* and *La Araucana*

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It is well known that in Cervantes’s drama *La Numancia*, the Roman general Scipio Aemilianus Africanus lays siege to the eponymous Celtiberian city, leading the inhabitants to commit collective suicide thereby depriving the imperial invaders of any spoils of war. This is not their first choice. In the beginning of the first act, the Numantines send ambassadors to Scipio to ask for peace, but he rejects their pleas and opts instead to starve them into submission. Somewhat less familiar is the story of García Hurtado de Mendoza’s arrival to Chile in 1557, to act as general in the escalating war with the rebellious Mapuche nation. According to Alonso de Ercilla’s account of these events in *La Araucana*, shortly after the young general arrives to Concepción, he is visited by Araucanian ambassadors, seeking peace. Hurtado de Mendoza accepts their proposal, but the truce does not last long. After the general and his men construct a fort, they soon find themselves surrounded by their Araucanian enemies, who attack from all sides.

Previous readers have discussed the resemblances between the events and characters in Ercilla’s epic and those in Cervantes’s tragedy, but these specific, inverted similarities have not been fully examined. This paper takes up the comparison of the two texts and explores the profound implications both for the image of Hurtado de Mendoza in *La Araucana* as well as for the perception of Scipio as a tragic hero in *La Numancia*. Finally, this paper considers what the similarities between the two generals reveal about Ercilla’s and Cervantes’s view of Spanish imperialism.