

Don Quixote's New World of Language

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WHAT IS IT THAT has given Cervantes' burlesque history of one particularly Ingenious Hidalgo its irresistible magnetic pull? Such a question is likely to have as many answers as *Don Quixote* has had admirers. Yet, major differences in scholarly interest and critical conviction notwithstanding, a very large number of readers seem to agree that one secret to this book's longevity can be found in its extraordinary way with *language*.¹

Such was the experience of the book's very first readers, to judge from the response to Don Quixote's published history related in the third chapter of Part II. Celebrating in jest what is clearly also meant in earnest, Sansón Carrasco, showers blessings on the original Moorish author ("Bien haya Cide Hamete Benengeli") and double blessings on the inquisitive soul who took the trouble to translate the history into the Castilian vernacular ("Rebién haya el curioso que tuvo cuidado de hacerlas traducir de arábigo en nuestro vulgar castellano" [II, 3, 59]). Citing multiple reprintings in Barcelona, Valencia, Portugal and Antwerp, and wagering that there is no nation or language where it will not be translated (II, 3, 60), he insists that the story's success hangs on its *language*: on the author's and the translator's scrupulous use of Arabic and Spanish respectively, and on the sheer delight occasioned by its representation of spoken language. For some readers, Sancho's speech seems to serve up the juiciest morsels of a sumptuous banquet: "hay tal que precia más oíros

¹ Earlier versions of some parts of the argument presented here have appeared in Spanish ("Decir y hacer" and "Don Quijote, Amadís").

[Sancho] hablar que al más pintado de toda ella [la historia]" (II, 3, 62).

As though seconding the Bachelor's report, 20th-century scholars have produced a voluminous bibliography on the language of *Don Quixote*. Whole books devoted to the question (Hatzfeld, Rosenblat) tell only a small part of a very long story. We have had the benefit of studies on "linguistic perspectivism" in the novel (Spitzer), on written language (Castro), on the chivalric archaisms and "proper language" of Don Quixote's speech (Mancing, Saldívar) and Sancho's "prevaricaciones lingüísticas" (Alonso), on the rhetoric of formal discourses by the Knight himself and others (notably Marcela), on proper names (Reyre) and proverbs, as well as a wealth of research on the specific debts of Cervantes' language to the many texts and genres which fed his imitative and parodic appetite. The cumulative critical syllabus boasts not a few scholarly articles focused on just one phrase, one verse, or even one word from the *Quixote*. Countering a more recent critical drift away from language-based inquiry, Isaías Lerner continues to make a compelling case, as historian of Spanish literary language, for the fruitfulness of scrutinizing Cervantes' lexical choices and the frequency of their usage "palabra por palabra."

Absent from the preceding catalogue are the large number of studies which propose *Don Quixote* as a pioneering work of narrative art, emblem of the processes by which books and fictions are made, and model for self-conscious verbal behavior in fictional characters and narrators. Meanwhile, often from a critical vantage point outside the Spanish language of the original, *Don Quixote* (now the book, now its title character) has enjoyed a whole new afterlife as allegorical incarnation of various linguistic functions: the *heteroglossia* of Bakhtin's "dialogic imagination," Levin's quixotic principle ("Art embarrassed by Nature"), Girard's "Romantic lies and novelistic truths," Alter's "partial magic," the hypothetical "infelicity" of Austin's performative language, and the classic pages of Foucault's *Les Mots et les choses*, which make of Cervantes' protagonist an errant signifier of the operations of Language itself. This is not to speak of the Don Quixote of fiction-writers and poets: Borges, for example, for whom a *Quixote* written in another place and time can be both identical to Cervantes' text and a wholly different book; and Wallace Stevens, for whom the Knight serves as implicit prototype for the "men made out of

words" who create themselves out of propositions about their fates.

Don Quixote's singularity is inseparable from its complexity as a verbal artifact. It is not just that Cervantes brings together, under one textual roof, an unprecedented variety of codes, reflecting and encompassing the linguistic and poetic richness of the real world of his time. Beyond late Renaissance generic hybridity, the author assigns to individual fictional persons, and in particular to Don Quixote, a range of styles, linguistic behaviors, and functions not found before in the speech of one literary character. But there is more, for not only do the novel's characters owe their being to this dazzling array of materials and functions: they are created as highly *conscious* of their linguistic and literary complexity. They think and talk not just about who they are, but about the *language* which makes them who they are, and about the process of linguistic imitation that will enable them to be what they want to be. This specifically *linguistic* and *rhetorical* self-awareness—one facet of the much-discussed self-reflexivity of Cervantes' most compelling characters—inflects the discourse of the story's narrators and of the author-character himself. It turns the story of the self-invention of an adventure seeker, into a *story of linguistic adventure*: of speech, of dialogue, of writing, of inherited and remembered expressions, of mimicry, of transcription, of play-acting, of poetic composition.

This feature of Cervantes' text is one which the historical reader Miguel de Cervantes could have observed in the growing body of writings about America. In the corpus of Spanish textual representations of the Indies, he would have found a cacophony of voices with disparate agendas, narratives transmitted from one writer to another over several generations, and above all, the American chroniclers' shared sense that on verbal activity and on *language itself* hung the success or failure of the high-stakes games of territorial appropriation, religious conversion, national history and personal advancement they were engaged in. In the heightened linguistic awareness and self-awareness of New World writers and speakers, Don Quixote's creator could have hit upon formulas which would shape his protagonist's linguistic behavior and his curious relationship with the custodians of his history.

The idea that Don Quixote is a creature of language and of fiction has

come more often from philology, stylistics, formalism, New Criticism, and post-structuralism, than from study of the text's real-world contexts, though the proposals of Américo Castro stand as an important exception to this generalization. In the present decade, as the force which the historical reality of the material world exerts over cultural production of all sorts is being acknowledged in every humanistic discipline and in the work of Cervantes scholars like Carroll Johnson,² I do not put the subject of Don Quixote's relation to language on the table with the intention of dragging critical inquiry back into a timeless and placeless scholarly sphere. On the contrary, I want to suggest that the most theoretically "abstract" aspects of Don Quixote's (both character and book) language have tangible historical roots. I propose here that the founding work of a genre (the modern novel) that has been shown to share many of its features with history finds its distinctive features not only in pseudo-historical play with historiographic conventions, but in serious history—history meant to inform and enlighten, to press national and personal agendas—and very particularly in the New World accounts Cervantes could have known. Drawing on models found in early texts about the Spanish experience in America, Cervantes gives Don Quixote the means to fashion himself out of words and to spin around himself a new fictional world of language.

What does it mean to say that Don Quixote is a creature of language? Like any fictional character, he exists through the medium of words printed on a page. Clearly, the self-appointed righter of wrongs wants more than the virtual existence of print: he longs actually to *live* in a romance world, where action would prevail over words. Yet in Cervantes' history, most of what the knight and his fellow characters are permitted to do is *talk*. Placing physical prowess beyond the reach of the middle-aged novice knight is, to be sure, part and parcel of a burlesque agenda. But that agenda turns out to be as complex as it is familiar. If non-stop talking often confirms the title character's impotence, Don Quixote's speech is made to encompass a great variety of rhetorical codes and functions, endowing him with a remarkable linguistic versatility. This virtuosity en-

² *Cervantes and the Material World* is a shining example of the rewards of New Historical method.

ables him to amaze readers and fellow characters who expect his *idée fixe* to produce fixed forms of “mad” chivalric utterance, like those of Avellaneda’s copycat type.

How, then, does this enriched verbal behavior define his being in the novel? What, exactly, does Don Quixote *do* with the *spoken word*? The Ingenious Hidalgo’s verbal behavior adds up to a comprehensive catalogue *avant la lettre* of the performative speech acts classified by J. L. Austin. He issues commands and other directives or “exercitives”: he exhorts others to action, negotiates, sends subordinates on errands, interrogates them about their findings. He threatens punishment, promises aid, commits himself to do battle (Austinian “commissives”). He defends and accuses persons present and absent, real and imagined (“verdictives”), confers names and epithets. He is liberal with insults to those he recruits as adversaries and is especially generous with congratulations (“behabitives”), to himself, and to others for their good fortune in crossing his path. He reads out in description and narrative his vision of the world (“expositives”), interpreting signs and translating for his squire, recoding the world around him, and most famously dictating aloud the chronicle of his future exploits and speculating on matters of historical causality past, present and future. In the process, moreover, he displays improvisatory skill in various compositional types associated with a multitude of “ciencias”: he delivers formal orations of edifying or moralizing intent on a broad range of topics, including chivalric codes of behavior and literary hermeneutics, prompting the squire to quip that he seems better suited for preaching than for knight-errantry (I.18, 226); he utters prophecies, predictions, and even medical prescriptions; he dictates promisory notes, love letters, verses; he produces narratives, both fictional and “documentary.”

The most striking aspect of Don Quixote’s verbal activity is that its virtuosity overflows the vessel of simple parody. Because Cervantes’ protagonist *does many more things with words* than his avowed chivalric model, his discursive curriculum can thus be used, like a prism, to display the multiple color-bands of the author’s parodic practice, permitting us to see which of the knight’s linguistic behaviors are modeled on chivalric romance and which are likely to have been suggested by other genres or by discursive modes beyond the province of literature. Some of the defin-

ing gestures of Don Quixote's speech are ones found in the vast corpus of writing about the New World.

A first step in sorting out the complexity of Don Quixote's verbal engagements, then, is to identify those of his characteristic speech behaviors which are found in the books of chivalry. Although the idea that language might play a central role in chivalric romance is, or has become, counterintuitive, a brief look into the knight's favorite romance can help us to recover the chivalric script that Don Quixote and his author know by heart. In Rodríguez de Montalvo's story, *pace* Rosenblat, words are not only very much a part of the literary knight's act: they are the premise on which chivalry's just militancy rests.³ The business of righting wrongs begins not with sword-play, but with talk. The Doncel del Mar's first confrontation with a wicked adversary illustrates the ritual unfolding of physical conflict through a carefully scripted ceremony of speech acts. In Book I, chapter 6, Amadís responds to signs of distress made by one of his story's nameless *doncellas*, who has suffered abuse and imprisonment at the hand of Galpano, lord of a formidable castle and many minions. According to what turns out to be a sturdy narrative pattern, the protagonist sees evidence of wrongdoing, hears calls for assistance, begs the victim to inform him about herself and her cause, proclaims her rights, promises to right the wrongs in question ("Dezidmelo—dixo él—, y si con derecho vos puedo remediar, fazerlo he;" "Venid conmigo, y daros he derecho si puedo" [I, 293]), demands from the offender an explanation of his motives, and finally warns ("Agora lo veréis" [I, 294], "agora compraréis la maldad que fezistes" [I, 296]) that he will soon deliver on the promise of his words. The hero's ultimatum, uttered as prelude to the drawing of his sword (in this instance slicing off the ear and nose of one of Galpano's henchmen before beheading the prime offender himself), is familiar from Don Quixote's frequent borrowings. Capping the sequence of entreaties, promises, accusations, traded insults (as in "Ay, cavallero sobervio, lleno de villanía" [I, 296] and threats, come the acts of physical violence which make the protagonist's words stick. Confirmation of this outcome in turn receives meticulous, redundant elaboration in the

3 In the introduction to his modernized edition of *Amadís de Gaula*, Rosenblat affirms that "lo genial de la obra está en la acción. Todo está supeditado a ella" (12).

hero's proclamation of his victory and confirmation of its beneficiary's newly won freedom of choice ("De hoy más podéis haver otro amigo si quisierdes, que este a quien jurastes despatchado es" [I, 298]), further instructions about spreading word of his triumph (the Doncel advises bearing Galpano's helmet rather than his head as a trophy), and reports from other encounters of the justice of the hero's vengeance.

The Doncel's word, as Austin would have it, *is his bond* and even better than his bond: it is his—and the author's—guarantee that *what he says* will be enacted in *what he does*. What is true of his explicit verbal commitments may be said of his speech as a whole. Every word Amadís utters carries an implicit promise that is, in the providential scheme of literary chivalry, both a *prophecy* and a *law* of this fictional universe. In the person of the protagonist, words and deeds form an indivisible unity, a *merismus* (as Malcolm Read has argued in the case of the Cid). In the romance, the words of the virtuous actor function as a secular *fiat*: the text bears witness not only to their persuasive energy (what Austin would call their *illocutionary force*) but to their *perlocutionary effects*, their ability to get things done, if at times with help from muscle and heavy metal. Conversely, the force of insults and threats issued by the text's miscreants (as happens with Galpano's "Ay, cavallero mal andante, en mal punto vistes la donzella, que aquí perderéis la cabeza" [I, 296]) is routinely annulled, not only by combat outcomes and the judgments of third parties, but by pointed taunts ("Agora guarde cada uno la suya [la cabeza] y el que la no amparare, piérdala") from the designated *hero of the word*.

As I have noted in another context, Don Quixote's appeal to the conventional chivalric and heroic alliance of words and deeds is foregrounded in the novel by repeated recourse to the narrative formula "diciendo y haciendo" ("Pulling Strings"). At the same time, authorial decision, implemented through narrative irony, characteristically voids the providential outcomes that Amadís can take for granted. By underscoring the temporal proximity of verbal and physical menacing, Cervantes' narrator underscores his protagonist's inability to make speech and action coincide. In J. L. Austin's terms, Don Quixote's chronic failure to achieve the *perlocutionary effects* he seeks in his attempts to *do things with words* makes him an emblematic author of *infelicitous speech acts*. In period terms, the

ambitious rhetoric that strays from its mark often paints Cervantes' big talker as rash, lacking in discretion, unsuited for a young man's vocation, vainglorious, mad. Yet, however insistently narrative art works to pull the rug out from under his character's railing and declaiming, there can be little doubt that Cervantes meant to make chivalric speech central to Don Quixote's imitative performance.

In the *Amadís*, the order which governs the discursive dimension of fighting and righting serves to animate other voices which confer mysteriously significant names on the protagonist or foretell marvelous feats. Authorial providence not only underwrites these voices, but makes cognitive, interpretive and verbal activity central to the chivalric text. All of the romance's successes and setbacks hang to one degree or another on the reading of signs (themselves often verbal), which prove more or less legible depending on the clairvoyance and moral authority of particular readers. Much of the verbal drama in the Doncel's history is generated by the blunders of bad readers like Galpano, who fail to grasp the power of the hero's word and make futile attempts to appropriate that power to their own voices. While a vast supporting cast engages in the business of deciphering the identity of the hero, the protagonist must read his way through a maze of signs—messages of an abstract, allegorical or prophetic nature, delivered by damsels, enchantresses, sage elders and others—exercising his ability to distinguish good from evil and friend from foe, as he moves toward the reclaiming of his name.⁴

When Foucault's Don Quixote roams the world in search of Significance, he is engaging, not in an exercise without precedent, but in the very activity that occupies the characters of countless providential chivalric histories. What makes the challenge faced by Cervantes' character differ from that confronted by Amadís is the decision to replace providence (fashioned in secular imitation of divine Providence) with a force variously called enchantment, fortune, chance or "el diablo que no duerme."⁵

4 On the epic and chivalric "Game of the Name," see Gaylord, "Spain's Renaissance Conquests."

5 According to Azar, chance in chivalric fiction is the other face of certainty. Coming to the text from the perspective of Greek epic, Wofford sees Don Quixote attempting to collapse the epic distance that separates the teller from his tale, while Cervantes' narrator reasserts that distance with subversive intent (391-413).

In expressions like the ubiquitous “quiso la suerte,” this roguishly named principle has little of uncertainly about it, signaling instead a move by the author to foil his creature’s designs and undo his heroic reading. In the *Quixote*, narrative appeals to “chance” are, above all, a mask for the parodic and satiric design which obliges heroic aspiration to struggle in unheroic surroundings.

In Montalvo’s romance, not only is all of the elaborate work performed by language underwritten by the authority of a providential author: these functions are also disseminated throughout the text. The business of prophecy, praise, instruction and narration is spread among a chorus of voices: the narrator, Urganda and sundry damsels, Amadís’s tutor, and other admiring fellow characters, who collectively construct the hero’s Fame by measuring his merits, singing his praises and speculating about his singular destiny. Don Quixote enjoys no such support. Amadís, who is never required to describe himself or tell his story, much less to boast of his triumphs, is portrayed as largely unaware of this otherwise nearly universal verbal activity. By contrast, his latter-day emulator—fully conscious of how much verbal backing the chivalric enterprise requires and anxious about its availability—is seen recruiting agents to carry out essential services and even instructing them in the performance of their duties. From the first moments of his history, Don Quixote takes almost entirely upon himself responsibility for the full range of providential romance functions: predicting and spreading the word of his triumphs (already in chapter 1’s script for the giant Caraculiambro’s embassy to Dulcinea), prematurely conferring on himself a heroic name, dictating the text of his future history to a phantom chronicler (I.2), congratulating himself on suspect triumphs (I.4), claiming a heroic destiny (I.20) or evoking the force of his right arm (I.43).⁶ When he receives assistance from other quarters, it tends to come not from speakers bent on discovering in him or his deeds some preordained significance, but from those who would humor or mock his self-monumentalizing project.

The two strategies we have been examining—ironic attention to the protagonist’s ambition to do heroic things with words, and concentra-

⁶ Don Quixote’s self-praise in chapter 43 of Part I is explored extensively in “The Whole Body of Fable.”

tion in a single character of the providential authorial functions of chivalric romance—work largely to configure Don Quixote as a failed chivalric speaker. But when Cervantes assigns to his title character other discursive modes—like the formal oration (eulogy or defense, as of Marcela), the scientific or philosophical discourse (on the Golden Age, chivalry, justice, peace, firearms, fame, geography, marriage, good government, poetry, folk wisdom), the sermon, political counsel, and the writing of his own history—he takes the knight from La Mancha beyond the books of chivalry into new imitative and intertextual territory.

Don Quixote's celebrated propensity to conflate history and fiction has distracted us from more nuanced aspects of this character's very special, and defining, relation to History.⁷ A narrator of both imaginary stories and serious history, the would-be hero composes aloud adventures and genealogies of other knights, historical accounts from the lives of heroes and saints, off-color anecdotes and the once and future history of his own career. Don Quixote does more than chronicle events and lives: he propounds theories of History, engaging period debates about what ought and ought not be inscribed in its annals (as in II, 3-5), about the merits of eye-witness and first-person accounts (I, 32), about personal and national ownership of History and the dangers of translation. He critiques, albeit from a self-interested position, multiple sources and viewpoints, most often in relation to Cide Hamete's original and the printed version of his own story. In short, he is a second-order historian, a practicing historiographer. The relation to History Don Quixote cultivates should not, of course, be confused with the positivist or relativist projects of later times. His interest in history bears the same essentialist stamp that marks his obsession with chivalry: he reads not for information, but for meaning; and he improvises narrative with a view to monumentalizing his own exemplarity and to securing his place as "señor de la historia" (II, 3, 61). By this route, the manifestations in speech of his historiographic muse dovetail with the other behaviors (performative, interpretive, exhortatory) we have been examining.

What models for this kind of this complex self-made, self-autho-

⁷ This argument is made at greater length in "Pulling Strings."

rizing, self-congratulating, self-witnessing, self-chronicling actor were available to Cervantes and to Don Quixote himself? It is time to look at how Early Modern chroniclers and critics of Spain's American conquests represent the verbal activity of their central figures, to see what Cervantes might have found in their accounts, both to fit out and to foil his protagonist. References to books which deal with Spain's New World experience are extremely rare in the *Quijote*; veiled allusions, few.⁸ This reticence makes conspicuous the two American chroniclers actually named in the text: Alonso de Ercilla and Hernán Cortés. Although the two are both *conquistadores* and *writers*, their figures undergo a division of labor: the author of *La Araucana* is celebrated for literary achievement (I, 6, 121), while the conqueror of Mexico appears as an action hero in pursuit of Fame (II.8, 96). The richness of Ercilla's profile in his own poem as soldier, courtier, lover, poet, historian, orator, may indeed have influenced the scripting of Don Quixote's multiple discursive roles. Like

8 By advertising familiarity with an impressive array of genres—romance, epic and prose epic, courtly verse, ballad, poetics and commentary, picaresque, novella, burlesque history, *auto*, *retablo*, *comedia*, proverb and folktale—the author's bibliographic "confessions" in this and others of his works appear exhaustive, but scholarship has unmasked some of their slyness. One telling case, studied in "Pulling Strings," can be found in Part II, chapter 24, where Cervantes borrows one of Cide Hamete Benengeli's authorial asides from none other than his contemporary, historian of Spain Juan de Mariana. Among titles with New World connections are Antonio de Torquemada's *Jardín de flores curiosas* (present only in name) and Cervantes' own *Galatea*. Chapter 11 of Part II alerts us to the author's knowledge of the 1557 *Auto de las Cortes de la Muerte* composed by Micael de Carvajal and Luis Hurtado de Toledo, one of whose twenty-one scenes features a tribe of natives and their *cacique*, pressing their complaints against the Spanish invaders. The enthusiasm for Lope de Rueda heard in *La Galatea* and the wink at the legendary city of Jauja found in *Don Quixote* (II.59) make it certain that he knew the dramatist's fifth *paso*. It is not easy to demonstrate that he read first-generation, first-person, eye-witness accounts like those of Columbus, Cortés and Alvar Núñez. Though not published until 1632, a manuscript of Bernal Díaz del Castillo's *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España* kept at the Escorial was available to official historians of the day and surely to Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas, Cervantes' neighbor in Valladolid. It is unlikely that he admired Herrera's *Hechos de los Castellanos* (1601-1615): Cide Hamete's farewell to his pen (II, 74, 592) creates an ironic link between the second-hand chronicler and Cervantes' rival ("escritor fingido y tordesillesco").

Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and much of Renaissance historiography, *Lq Araucana* makes set speeches and formal discourses on philosophical subjects integral to its story-telling. But Ercilla does not foreground his autobiographical character as a heroic speaker. That feature of Don Quixote's persona has more direct links to Hernán Cortés.

As a founding father of conquest literature, Cortés had become one of the most famous actors in the drama of European expansion. Despite the legal controversies that swarmed about them and their heirs, he and Columbus were held as articles of national pride, their figures approaching mythic status. It is difficult to trace later recreations of either of these historical figures to a single text because, like all motifs of oral culture, they are passed from hand to hand, or from voice to voice. Their stories come to constitute a kind of virtual source, generally available for borrowing, as repetition adds a new layers to a familiar picture. By the time Cervantes was conceiving and composing his burlesque history, when their own texts would no longer have been in wide circulation, these two conquest heroes *par excellence* had for decades been enjoying a busy afterlife in re-makes of their stories, as well as not a few cameo appearances such as the one made by Cortés in Fernando de Herrera's lavish gloss on the phrase "el osado español" in his 1580 *Anotaciones* (903-904).

In and of itself, this composite quality of the Cortés lore makes it an ideal resource for a character like Don Quixote, whose imitative practice is overwhelmingly oral. Although much of the would-be knight's activity is inspired by the books he has sold his ancestral lands to buy, he is never again—after the opening chapter's decisive scene of reading—seen to consult an actual book of chivalry. His muse works not only from books but from oral material (like the *Romancero*) stored, more or less accurately, in his head. From this virtual archive, he quotes at will, conflating multiple sources, usually to unintended comic effect. But what would make New World hero stories irresistible for Don Quixote's improvisatory self-fashioning is their focus on history's *heroic speakers*, who are called upon to use spoken language in a telling range of ways. The most powerful of these American voices is that of Hernán Cortés.

In the textual record of Spain's American conquests as in oral culture, Hernán Cortés knows no equal as prototype of the inspiring com-

mander the Canon of Toledo would like to read about in his ideal prose epic, “un capitán valeroso con todas las partes que para ser tal se requieren, mostrándose prudente previniendo las astucias de sus enemigos, y elocuente orador persuadiendo o disuadiendo a sus soldados, maduro en el consejo, presto en lo determinado” (I, 47, 566). The happy accident of family name helped ensure that the Marqués del Valle de Oaxaca would be linked to the communicative virtues of *cortesía*. Still proverbial, the pairing of *cortés* with *valeroso* or *valiente* is often heard in Early Modern instances like Góngora’s “Romance de los Çenetes” (“Valiente eres, capitán,/ y cortés como valiente:/ por tu espada y por tu trato/ me has cautivado dos veces” [145] and Calderón’s *El príncipe constante* (“Valiente eres, español,/ y cortés como valiente;/ tan bien vences con la lengua/ como con la espada vences” [cited in Rabasa]).

Of all the New World soldier writers, the conqueror of Tenochtitlán arguably knew most about “how to do things with words.”⁹ Mustering his knowledge of legal language and his rhetorical skill to shore up the political and military authority he has high-jacked from Diego Velázquez, to make Mexican enterprise not only acceptable but pleasing to the Emperor, Cortés begins to cement his reputation as master speaker in his letters from Mexico. In the second *Carta de relación*, drafted following the first campaign to take Montezuma’s stronghold, the commander scripts his march on Tenochtitlán as a high drama of cognition and communication in which his own intellect and his words have the leading role. In the process, he manages to create his own figure as a master of language. He portrays himself as the great decoder who systematically uncovers the “secrets” of the place—its extent, riches, and natural wonders like volcanoes—and as the supreme strategist and diplomat, who deals equally effectively with the human landscape, making friends, unmasking “liars” and “traitors,” not hesitating to deceive his enemies. The self-chronicling narrator never quotes his own words; but, narrating in

9 Much keen scholarly attention has been devoted to the language of Hernán Cortés. See Todorov on Cortés as reader of signs, Loesberg on legal language, Merrim on self-writing, Rabasa on dialogue as conquest. Clendinnen’s demystifying argument finds historical contradictions of the Cortés myth in the indigenous record. Carman studies Cortés’ and Gómara’s investment in the notion of rhetorical conquest; his recent book contains up-to-date bibliography on Cortés and Gómara.

the first person, he recounts the events of his expedition as a sequence of speech acts, subordinating other speakers (including his *lenguas*) to the moral authority, cunning and power of his voice, and causing the violence that frequently accompanies his words to fade into euphemism (“les hice mucho daño”).

It is impossible for us to know whether Cervantes read the *Cartas de relación* in which the maverick from Extremadura communicated his Mexican discoveries, travails and successes to the Emperor. But a reference by Don Quixote to “el cortesísimo Cortés” (II.8, 96) makes it very probable that his author knew the second-hand version of the conquest of Mexico in which that epithet had been coined. Written by Francisco López de Gómara, Cortés’ chaplain from 1542 to 1547, the *Historia General de las Indias y Conquista de México* went through five editions in Spain and the Low Countries between 1552 and 1554, despite having been banned in 1553. Before the end of the century, it had nine more printings in Italy, five of them in the 1560s on the eve of Cervantes’s arrival in Italy. If none of these made its way into his hands, Cervantes’ hopes of traveling to America and his admiration for Ercilla make it unlikely he would not have been aware of epic poems published in Madrid in the years following his return from Algerian captivity.¹⁰ Many derivative accounts of his career develop the portrait of Cortés as singular, commanding speaker which originates with the *Cartas*; after 1552, they often bear the stamp of Gómara’s historiographical method.

Unencumbered by the “modestia de caballero y de coronista propio” which the Curate, unwitting mouthpiece for an authorial irony not evident to readers of today, attributes to Diego García de Paredes’ hyperbolic account of his own exploits in the Mediterranean (I, 32; 395-96), the *Conquista de México*’s narrator uses two monumentalizing strategies unsuited to the self-chronicler. He gives free rein to a narrative poetics

10 These include two Gómara spin-offs devoted to Cortés—the 1594 *Mexicana* of Gabriel Lobo Lasso de la Vega (*Cortés valeroso* in its first 1588 version) and the 1599 *El peregrino indiano*, whose author, Antonio Saavedra Guzmán, was Cervantes’ namesake. All but certain, too, is the familiarity of Don Quixote’s inventor with Juan de Castellanos’ *Elegías de varones ilustres de Indias*, whose first part appeared in Madrid in 1589. Castellanos omits Cortés from his New World pantheon, but he represents Christopher Columbus as a prophetic and persuasive speaker.

of exemplarity, and he ventriloquizes, inventing the set speeches which serve as stand-ins for the conquistador's words. In the shift from first- to second-order history, the Caesarian *preterite first person* (*yo hice, yo dije*) of the *Cartas* gives way to two distinct personas: the conventional third person of historical narration and the first person of quoted speech. Working in the tradition of Renaissance historiography, Gómara equips his Cortés with a series of set speeches like the ones delivered to fire up his men for the campaign to come, to prevent mutiny or to rationalize the scuttling of the ships, and the harangue against pagan idolatry delivered on the occasion of the smashing of figures of Aztec deities. These verbal performances become standard in later representations. More resilient even than tags like "el cortesísimo," it is the speeches the historian concocts for his central figure that determine the popular persona of Spain's foremost conquistador.

Gómara makes Cortés not only a commanding leader but a moral philosopher, preacher, and prophet as well. Like Las Casas' version of Columbus' journals, the *Historia general de las Indias y Conquista de México* uses its protagonist's speech as a proleptic and meta-historiographic partner in the writing of History. Speaking to his wavering men, the *Conquista's* hero is reported to declare: "Es cierto, amigos y compañeros míos, que todo hombre de bien y animoso quiere y procura igualarse por propias obras con los excelentes varones de su tiempo y hasta de los pasados. Así es que *yo acometo una grande y hermosa hazaña, que será después muy famosa*; pues me da el corazón que tenemos que ganar grandes y ricas tierras, muchas gentes nunca vistas, y mayores reinos que los de nuestros reyes" (57, my italics). Though not always kept together in other texts, two central parts of this speech—the discourse on Fame and the hero's prediction of his future conquests—become ubiquitous.¹¹ Both reflect providential history's fondness for prophetic utterances formulated as certainty, in what Jacques Derrida (writing about prologues)

¹¹ Carman analyzes the rhetorical strategies and ideological investments scripted into this and other speeches from the *Conquista de México*. In this first speech, he argues, Gómara has Cortés transform himself "from adventurer into leader by redefining, for his men, and for the reading public, Spain's mission in the New World" (122). I am indebted to Glen Carman for calling my attention, many years ago, to the quixotic flavor of Cortés' first speech.

calls the “soothing order of the *future perfect* tense” (l’ordre apaisant du futur antérieur”).

The “I” of any utterance, as the great linguist Émile Benveniste has helped us to understand, has a very particular grammatical function. Tied to one person speaking in a determined here and now, but only for as long as that person continues to speak, the “I” space stands perpetually open to appropriation by new occupants. Because their “I’s” are easily cut free from their narrative moorings, the set speeches of Gómara’s Cortés were destined to lead a life of their own in subsequent recreations of the speech-making conquistador. The possibilities they offered for poetic embellishment proved tempting to a poetic chronicler, Gabriel Lobo Lasso de la Vega, who makes repeated use of Gómara’s speeches, not only in the *octavas reales* of his *Mexicana*, but in *romances* that sum up the prose appreciations of his *Elogios en loor de los tres famosos varones Don Jaime, rey de Aragón; Don Fernando Cortés, marqués del Valle, y Don Álvaro de Bazán, marqués de Santa Cruz* (1601). In Gabriel Lobo Lasso’s ballads (Durán, II, 145-47, nos. 1144-46) we hear bite-size versions of the exhortation to his men (in no. 1144 before the legendary burning of the ships), accompanied by a discourse on Fame; his ultimatum to Montezuma (in no. 1145), with a prophetic defense of his own audacity (born of the “noble pecho/ Que a altas cosas me inclina”) and a lesson on divinely authorized monarchy and kingly behavior; and the harangue against idolatry (in no. 1146) before the smashing of Aztec statues. Like Gómara, Lobo Lasso takes care to document the perlocutionary efficacy of his protagonist’s words with testimony from Cortés’ men (“Todo el campo, con voz alta/ El alto hecho loando,/ Alzan de nuevo las diestras/ De morir con él jurando”), Montezuma (“Hágase cual lo disponen/ Tus deidades ofendidas.../ Vamos, valiente español”), and the defenders of native religion. In the ballads’ providential world, all are made to bow before the force and “truth” of his utterances: “al fin, todo lo puede/ El que tiene a Dios propicio” (Durán, II, 147).

Historical reference by itself removes the American chronicles’ representations of heroic speech from the timeless utopian space of chivalric fiction and sets it in the context of putatively real events. But the figure of Cortés advances bolder claims. With an insistent focus on his verbal ac-

tivity, the “*coronista propio*” of the *Cartas* presses the view that his speech acts are essential to the march, and to the writing, of national history. Still more pointed is the maverick commander's decision to identify his speaking voice explicitly with the new law of the land, by scripting his utterances as performances of an officially legislated imperial protocol: the notorious *Requerimiento* of 1513, which every Spanish invader was required (until passage of the New Laws in 1543) to read aloud prior to each “entry” of a new territory. Marked with an anonymous “N,” the space of the *Requerimiento*'s “I” is left blank, ready to be filled—momentarily—by a new speaker who is instructed to give his own name, while affirming that he speaks *in the name of* God and His Son, of the Church and its holy men, and finally of a temporal ruler: “De parte de S. M. Don N., Rey de Castilla, etc. Yo, N., su criado, mensajero y capitán, vos notifico y hago saber como mejor puedo...” Conceived as a compromise between statesmen, armed explorers and theologians, the *Requerimiento*'s surrogate voice proclaims to the natives, as *fact* and *fait accompli*, God's creation of the world, the principle of apostolic succession, the papal donation to Spain of American territories, and the consequence of both: God's love makes indigenous peoples children of God, wards of the Church and vassals of the Spanish monarchy.¹² It goes on to entreat and require them (“Por ende, como mejor puedo, os ruego y requiero que entendáis bien esto que os he dicho...”) first to understand the edict, then to accept its terms: they must agree to the entry of foreigners in their territories, consent to be preached to, and within a reasonable space of time (“y toméis para entenderlo y deliberar sobre ello el tiempo que fuese justo”) acknowledge the truth and justice of the new order of things by converting to the Christian faith. The other face of that sanguine declaration and its accompanying invitation is a non-negotiable ultimatum: “Si no lo hicieris, o en ello dilación maliciosamente pusieris, certificoos que con la ayuda de Dios yo entraré poderosamente contra vosotros y vos haré guerra por todas las partes y maneras que yo pudiere, y os sujetaré al yugo y obediencia de la Iglesia y de Su Magestad.” Finally, to such promised injuries as dismemberment, expropriation and slavery, the document adds

12 For the origins of the *Requerimiento* of 1513, see the classic study of Hanke and the recent historical and comparative analysis of Seed.

the insult of accusation: “y protesto que las muertes y daños que de ello recrecieren sea a vuestra culpa, y no de Su Magestad, ni mía, ni de estos caballeros que conmigo vinieron.” Intended as script for diplomatic and military encounters, the *Requerimiento* would also become the master fable of Spanish conquest historiography, continuing to underwrite representations as diverse as the *Naufragios* of Alvar Núñez and the *Loa* to Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz’s *Auto del Divino Narciso* long after it had been retired from active service.

Although the document is never quoted in its entirety in the *Cartas de relación*, the echo of its demands and its logic can be heard in language like that of the following excerpt from the commander’s account of his entry into a town identified as Caltanmy (Santiago Zautla, Puebla): “Yo les torné aquí a decir y replicar el gran poder de Vuestra Magestad, y [que] otros muy muchos y muy mayores señores que no Muteecuma eran vasallos de Vuestra Alteza y aun que no lo tenían en pequeña merced, y que así lo había de ser Muteecuma y todos los naturales destas tierras y que así se lo requería a él que lo fuese, porque siéndolo sería muy honrado y favorecido, y por el contrario no queriendo obedecer sería punido” (171). The second *Carta* is peppered with similar narrative instances, no doubt meant to assure His Majesty that his maverick servant took royal interests to heart. With the *Requerimiento*, Gómara follows the *Cartas*’ lead, narrating that draconian sequence of speech acts rather than quoting them, and emphasizing the edict’s offer of honor, protection and saving Grace over the alternative consequence of military attack. The *Conquista de México* uses formal speeches on various subjects to portray a civilized, Christian captain who would prefer peaceful transfer of power to the violence he does not hesitate to use when it is required.

Even the testimony of the defender of Native Americans confirms the reputation of Cortés as a man of words and mouthpiece for the Spanish empire’s most notorious military protocol. It is no accident that the author of the *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* chooses New Spain as stage for his tirade against the edict that had been meticulously deconstructed by Francisco de Vitoria. Not satisfied with giving a scathing summary of the invader’s recitation (“decir que viniesen a sujetarse al rey de España, donde no, que los habían de matar y hacer esclavos. Y

los que no venían tan presto a cumplir tan irracionales y estultos menajes, y a ponerse en las manos de tan inicuos y crueles y bestiales hombres, llamábanles rebeldes, y alzados contra el servicio de Su Majestad”) and its notarization (“Y así lo escrebían acá al rey nuestro señor”), Las Casas mocks the *Requerimiento* with a capsule parody of its speech acts (“Daos a obedecer a un rey estraño, que nunca viestes ni oistes, y si no, sabed que luego os hemos de hacer pedazos”), asking reasonable Christians (“que saben algo de Dios y de razón, y aun de las leyes humanas”), who know what it is to count on the safety of their homes and their innocence, to imagine hearing such a speech (108). The celebrated “pico de oro” of the scourge of Mexico makes him the quintessence of an enterprise which the Dominican refuses to honor with his own name or the title of “conquistador.”¹³ The large number of copies of Las Casas’s collected discourses (1552) still in circulation in our own day make it seem likely that Cervantes would have been acquainted with his writings. If he did not actually read any of these, he would have been exposed to the Dominican’s ideas in the *Auto de las Cortes de la Muerte* and perhaps in the *Apologías y discursos* of a contemporary Sepúlveda partisan, the *indiano* Bernardo de Vargas y Machuca, who makes a phantom appearance among descendants of one of Don Quixote’s Reconquest heroes (I, 8).

Although the discoverer of 1492 is never mentioned in the *Quixote* and the invader of Mexico does not make his cameo appearance until the second volume, a number of behaviors attributed to the protagonist suggest that his author had these towering figures very much in mind from the inception of the *Historia del Ingenioso Hidalgo*. Curiously, Cervantes’ Cortés, like Herrera’s, is not evoked as a speaker, though valor and audacity combined put him in the company of others whom the burning desire for Fame has carried to the brink of madness (II, 8: 96). But in Don Quixote’s history, as in the *Brevísima relación*, New World super-heroes are given a nameless presence—or a presence under another name—through the recognizable forms of their speech. The “I” spaces of the Cortés and Columbus traditions would have been as irresistible for an aspiring world- and self-maker like Don Quixote as they must have been for his

13 See Gibson on “las dichas conquistas” of Spaniards in America.

creator. With one of the signature gestures of his versatile act—the prophetic first-person prophecies and premature congratulations that make the protagonist a partner in the writing of history—Cervantes is dipping into conquest texts and lore. He could be thinking not only of Cortés but of Columbus, as represented by Las Casas or later poetic recreations that make the Admiral of the Ocean Sea a visionary and a prophetic speaker. In the first canto of the *Elegías de Varones Ilustres de Indias*, Juan de Castellanos has Colón (who is attempting to recruit the Catholic Kings as his sponsors) proclaim: “A hechos importantes he llamado,/ a cosas no dudosas os provoco,/ Negocio no fingido ni soñado,/ Y si prometo mucho no doy poco;/ No voy de mi salud desesperado,/ Ni me muevo con furias de hombre loco;/ Caso dudoso es por ser extraño,/ Mas del mismo saldrá su desengaño” (68). If Cervantes did not pause when he read these lines, he could not have failed to note, several octaves later, a skeptical character’s remark that Colón “menos tiene de cuerdo que de loco” (73). The expanded verbal activity of Cervantes’ would-be *caballero* suggests many more links to prose and verse representations of New World chivalry. In his updated repertory we find edifying discourses not only of the *kind* scripted for chronicle characters, but on a host of subjects lately associated with the New World: the Golden Age, islands, ceremonies of possession, rivalry of armed and religious participants, arms and letters, true history, Fame and Fortune, good government, slavery and so on.

But, as he follows the chronicles’ lead by expanding the range of his fictional knight’s verbal activity, Don Quixote’s author simultaneously returns to the bedrock of chivalric speech that he found in the *Amadís*, reflecting—and indicting—the transformation of the righteous ultimatum as it had been performed in material places and in historical time. The peremptory *requerimientos* issued in Part I, chapters 3, 4, 8, 15, 18-22 and elsewhere sometimes sound as though they have been lifted straight from the conquistador’s verbal arsenal. When Don Quixote demands that the silk merchants from Murcia *confess the sovereignty* not of the King but of Dulcinea, the bewildered plea of one (“suplico a vuestra merced... porque no encarguemos nuestras conciencias confesando una cosa por nosotros jamás vista ni oída” [I, 4, 100]) sounds a near-perfect echo of the protest which Las Casas had put in the mouths of the Mexi-

can natives destined to be Cortés' vassals. In a passage like this one, what we have been accustomed to reading as parody—hilariously infelicitous reenactment of chivalric gestures—abruptly unmasks itself as satire.

The implied New World models for Don Quixote's latter-day chivalric enterprise, and the polemic which still hangs about the historical "empresa de América" at the turn of the 17th century, take the fictional historian to the threshold of invective. But just as Cervantes does not play Montalvo to Don Quixote's Amadís, or Gómara to his Cortés, neither does he play Las Casas, at least not in a consistent way. While he ridicules his protagonist, making his attempts at executing heroic speech acts seem ineffectual, superfluous, or gratuitously damaging, and exposing the hollowness of his self-enhancing rhetoric, Cervantes does not subject his most complex creature to righteous indignation or moral tirades of his own. This is not to say that he does not use his character to put serious ethical and political dilemmas on the fictional table. But, rather than defend innocents or rail against villains, Cervantes contents himself with camouflaging the burning issues of History in the confusing garb of Farce. When his hero declaims his *requerimientos* to merchants, to an adversary who does not speak Spanish, to mares, to actual *sheep* (in comic literalization of Las Casas's shorthand for the docile indigenous peoples), or when his would-be conquistador harangues against the cardinal sin of that breed, *Codicia*, the writer multiplies the rhetorical and ethical contradictions that hover around the American chapters of Spanish history. If explicit reference scarcely suggests admiration (most of the book's rare New World references make it a mine of material riches, while only one cites an instance of heroism), the historical author must have been as ambivalent as he was critical with respect to the American dream he once hoped to share. From the standpoint of *literature*, his view would have been no less complex. For, while he surely did not admire as exceptional aesthetic artifacts the American epics he declined to place in the hidalgo's library or on his own avowed reading syllabus, he must have found them overflowing with grist for his parodic and satiric mill. There, in the fulsome speech of New World super-heroes, in the overreach of their language and in their do-it-yourself approach to the monumentalizing business of History and Poetry, he found quixotic inspiration for

the wordiness of our favorite character.

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