Language and Gender in *Don Quixote*: Teresa Panza as Subject

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Teresa Panza, the wife of Don Quijote's famous squire Sancho, is depicted in a drawing in Concha Espina's book, *Mujeres del Quijote*, as an older and somewhat heavy woman, dressed in the style of the *pueblo*, with a sensitive facial expression and an overall domestic air. This is, in fact, the way in which we imagine her through most of Part I, when her identity is limited to that of a main character's wife, and a somewhat unintelligent one at that. Concha Espina herself says that Cervantes' book offers her to us as "la digna compañera del buen Sancho, llena de rustiquez y de ignorancia" (90). Other critics have at least recognized that Teresa, like most of Cervantes' female characters, exhibits alertness and resolve (Combet 67). Teresa, however, eludes these simple characterizations. Dressed in all the trappings of an ignorant and obedient wife, she bounds over the linguistic and social borders which her gender imposes. In the open space beyond, Teresa develops discourse as a non-gendered subject. Her voice becomes one which her husband must reckon with in the power struggle which forms the context of their language. By analyzing the strategies for control utilized in this conflict, we see that it is similar to another power struggle with which we are quite familiar: that of Don Quijote and Sancho. The parallels discovered between the two highlight important aspects of the way in which Teresa manages her relationship to power,[1] and reveal that both conflicts are fundamentally the same. They bring to light that gender, like class in the case of Don Quijote and Sancho, is an essential element in the struggle between the married couple. More importantly, they reaffirm that gender is an issue, and must be considered whenever it forms part of the context of a power struggle.

In order to understand how the character of Teresa Panza succeeds in moving in a non-marginalized space, we must look at the linguistic environment in which Cervantes brings this character into existence. The first impressions which the novel gives us of her are,

at best, sketchy. Sancho refers to her by two different names in the same conversation (87; I, vii), and tells Don Quijote that he doesn't think Teresa is worth much as queen of an island (87; I, vii). The few additional times that Sancho mentions her in Part I, she is simply referred to as "mi mujer." Leo Spitzer adds:

> But in part 2, chapter 5, Sancho's wife calls herself Teresa Cascajo; from then on she is either Teresa Panza or Teresa Sancho, "mujer de Sancho Panza [wife of Sancho Panza]"; of the name Teresa itself she says (2.5): "Teresa me pusieron en el bautismo, nombre mondo y escueto .... [they named me Teresa at my baptism, a pure and simple name]." Evidently we have to do with a woman named Juana Teresa Gutiérrez, who becomes a Juana Panza or Teresa Panza when called after her husband, or ... Cascajo when called after her father" (Spitzer 11).

Cervantes' insistent qualifier for Teresa, "mujer de Sancho Panza," by alleviating doubt as to who she really is, allows him to play with her name. It also forces us to limit her identity to something which is relative to Sancho; she cannot have her own identity when she doesn't even have a definitive name which refers to it.

In Part II, when the issue of her name seems to be resolved, Teresa points out that it really isn't: "Cascajo se llamó mi padre; y a mí, por ser vuestra mujer, me llaman Teresa Panza, que a buena razón me habían de llamar Teresa Cascajo" (614; II, v). The social norms, which impose on Teresa either her father's or her husband's name, and thereby impose on her a relative identity, one whose only meaning comes from those men, are shown here to be arbitrary by the very person whom those norms attempt to control. Teresa shows that she perceives her own identity to be something else, something whole and separate which these given names do not contain in their meaning. She takes as the *sign* for this identity her Christian name, Teresa, "sin añadiduras ni cortapisas, ni arrequives, de *dones* ni *donas* ..." (614; II, v). Teresa herself seems to take control of the very language in which the author has embedded her and which has fed our expectations that she will act within social norms. She seems to rise out of the text before us, refusing to be constrained. Ruth El Saffar explains:

> It is in the gap which the author establishes between story and teller, between story and reader, that the novel depotentiates... all tendencies to identify with the divisions and oppositions which structure language as well as society. ("In Praise" 205-6)

Not only does Teresa depotentiate her being "named" to a marginal position, but other characters, Sancho being the best example, persistently multiply and misuse names and words. Spitzer postulates that Cervantes' intention is to show "the multivalence which different words possess for different human minds" (16), and concludes that for Cervantes, "words are . . . sources of hesitation, error, deception—'dreams'" (17). Ruth El Saffar adds that in Cervantes names "patch over a shifting, multi-faceted reality, hoping to be taken at face-value" ("Confessions" 268). According to Cervantes, then, names and the meaning of words are not only subjective, but deceiving. And, over the cracked and fissured terrain of reality, labels have no value. Teresa's gender normally carries with it a host of such labels:

> Women are precisely defined, never as general representatives of human or all people, but as specifically feminine, and frequently sexual, categories: whore, slag, mother, virgin, housewife.... The curious feature is exactly the excess of (sexual) definitions and categories for women. A similar profusion is not found for men.... (Black and Coward 129)

In the nebulous atmosphere of language in *Don Quixote*, in which the linguistic barriers erected by labels are blurred, so are the social constraints which such labels maintain in existence. This is open space for Teresa: she can represent herself in language free from those constraints and she can develop as a person removed from the labels of her gender, as a non-gendered subject.

We can see the way in which Teresa develops as a subject by analyzing various aspects of her language. Several aspects come to light if we look at Teresa's tendency to ask questions, many of these serving to initiate verbal exchanges. The three conversations which she has with her husband all begin with a question from her. When Sancho arrives home after his first trip with his master, she asks how the ass is. Then, when Sancho comes home from Don Quijote's house, she asks why he is so happy. Finally, at the end of the novel, when

Sancho returns home for good, she asks how it is that he is coming home looking less like a governor and more like one who is misgoverned. In all three cases, had Teresa not ever asked a question, would there have been any verbal exchange at all? None of the conversations directly influences the actions of Sancho to the extent that they could not have been replaced with concise narrative description. Instead, however, we hear the voice of Teresa, whether the author needed it or not, and it almost seems that it is because she herself chose to speak, because she autonomously decided to initiate language where otherwise there might have been none.

Teresa also asks questions to solicit clarification, such as when she says: "'Mas decidme: ¿Qué es eso de ínsulas, que no lo entiendo?'" (556; I, lii). This example is particularly interesting because Sancho, who has used the word "ínsula" since Don Quijote first promised him one, never bothered to ask what it meant, even though he never knew. And yet, Teresa, when confronted with the word only once, asks for its meaning. This question shows that even when Teresa is the listener, she perceives her role as an active one. She seems to understand that as an active participant in a discourse, her dialogue with Sancho, her response must embody understanding of the utterance which preceded it. Bakhtin highlights the importance of the listener's understanding in any type of discourse:

> The listener and his response are regularly taken into account when it comes to everyday dialogue and rhetoric, but every other sort of discourse as well is oriented toward an understanding that is "responsive". . . . Responsive understanding is a fundamental force, one that participates in the formulation of discourse, and it is moreover an *active* understanding, one that discourse senses as resistance or support enriching the discourse. (280-81)

In this case, Teresa's inability to extract meaning from the word "ínsula" prevented her from constructing that understanding and therefore a response. She stopped, then, to get that meaning, unlike her husband who simply invented his own understanding, and responded according to that.

Another type of question which clearly indicates Teresa's awareness of the dynamics of language, and specifically the importance of the listener, is one she uses to focus Sancho's attention on what she

is about to say: "—Sabéis por qué, marido? —respondió Teresa—. Por el refrán que dice: '¡Quien te cubre, te descubre!'" (615; II, v). Here Teresa, attempting to keep her listener engaged, prepares him to receive the utterance so he can understand it and then respond to it.

Teresa also shows herself to be very assertive through language. Many of her statements, requests which blatantly reveal her interests, are attempts to direct the behavior of the other interlocutor (Sancho): "contadme agora, amigo" (556; I, lii); "mostradme esas cosas" (556; I, lii); "Mas decidme" (556; I, lii); "Mi señora la duquesa te dirá el deseo que tengo de ir a la corte; mírate en ello, y avísame de tu gusto . . . ." (982; II, lii); "Envíame tú unas sartas de perlas" (982; II, lii); "Traed vos dinero" (1128; II, lxxiii). She could not make any clearer what she wants her listener to understand and how she wants him to respond.

In all of these cases it is clear that the question or the request controls the direction of the verbal exchange. In the first case illustrated above, it determines the very occurrence of language and its initial direction. In the second and third cases, it seeks to affect the listener's response. And in the last case, its purpose is to directly control the behavior of the listener. Underlying all of these examples is an awareness that the utterance is directly related to the one that will follow it. Bakhtin points out:

> . . . every word is directed toward an *answer* and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates. The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer's direction. (280)

A question or a request does not only anticipate a response, like all words, but it also requires and demands one that contains within it the parameters which the question *word* or the request *word* gives to it. Thus, it seems that these two types of utterances have the strongest and most forceful orientation toward the "future answer-word." Teresa, who seems to understand this, capably utilizes this type of language to her benefit.

An analysis of isolated aspects of Teresa's language, while providing us with insight into Teresa's development as a subject in the

novel, is incomplete unless it is considered in the context of the power struggle, the context in which her discussions with her husband take place. In these we see various ways in which Teresa attempts to produce language in a space removed from well-defined, gender-based roles, a space in which she and Sancho are on equal ground. Sancho, however, who seeks the dominant position normally afforded the "husband," consistently tries to reinsert the dimension of gender and generate meaning along its axis. Toril Moi gives a general description of the mechanics of this struggle through language:

> . . . we all use the same language, but . . . we have different interests—and interests must here be taken to mean political and power-related interests which intersect in the sign. The meaning of the sign is thrown open—the sign becomes 'polysemic' rather than 'univocal'—and though it is true to say that the dominant power group at any given time will dominate the intertextual production of meaning, this is not to suggest that the opposition has been reduced to total silence. The power struggle intersects in the sign. (158)

We see a similar struggle through language take place between Sancho and Don Quijote, in which Don Quijote seeks to dominate by producing meaning not along gender lines, but instead along the axis of feudal class structure. Sancho is often forced to acknowledge Don Quijote's "production of meaning" in which he reasserts the hierarchy promoted by the terms "master" and "servant."

The dialogue between Teresa and Sancho in Part II, Chapter 5, best illustrates the dynamics of the conflict for control in which they engage. This chapter begins when Sancho, having just returned from his master's house, is happy to know that he will once again be leaving to accompany him on his adventures. Teresa asks him why he is so happy, and Sancho responds: "—Mujer mía, si Dios quisiera, bien me holgara yo de no estar tan contento como muestro" (611; II, v). When Sancho answers Teresa's question in this way, she understands what the individual words mean, but joined together as they are, they seem illogical. Here again, when Teresa, as an active listener, cannot construct meaning from the previous utterance, she does not simply brush this aside and respond anyway. She makes clear to Sancho the contradiction apparent in his "taking pleasure in not being happy," and Sancho, frustrated in his attempt to use more sophisticated language,

must resort to an anwer which is more easily understood: "—Mirad, Teresa —respondió Sancho—: yo estoy alegre porque tengo determinado de volver a servir a mi amo don Quijote . . ." (611; II, v). But even after beginning so clearly, he tries to elucidate his conflicting feelings on the matter— Sancho, whose thoughts usually go no farther than the next meal, has conflicting feelings?— and proceeds to get tangled up in an eloquent, but somewhat circuitous explanation.

These rhetorical answers on the part of Sancho surprise us, and in fact, surprise the "translator," Cide Hamete: he believes that this chapter is apocryphal. What we definitely notice is the similarity between Sancho's manner of speaking and that of Don Quijote, Teresa herself making that observation:

> —Mirad, Sancho—replicó Teresa—: después que os hicistes miembro de caballero andante habláis de tan rodeada manera, que no hay quien os entienda. (612; II, v)

Indeed, it seems here that Sancho, suddenly less concerned about communication than about his rhetorical style, is successfully filling the shoes of his master. And Teresa, who is primarily concerned with getting meaning across, is taking the position that Sancho constantly maintains while with Don Quijote.

Another parallel between the positions assumed by Teresa and Sancho in this discussion and those respectively of Sancho and Don Quijote in certain dialogues, is evident in the way in which Teresa tries to focus Sancho on his own language and its implications: "—¿Veis cuanto decís, marido? —respondió Teresa—. Pues con todo eso, temo que este condado de mi hija ha de ser su perdición" (614; II, v). Teresa senses that Sancho's words are spilling forth unexamined; she is saying in a strident tone: "Do you really see what you are saying?!" By forcing him to be conscious of his language, Teresa is attempting to invoke in him a consciousness of his actions. This might enable Sancho to control the irrational and impulsive behavior which in this case so threatens Teresa's interest, her desire to marry her daughter to a social equal.

Sancho, too, consistently attempts to invoke in Don Quijote a consciousness of his own words, in order to deter him from the behavior which such words forecast. When Don Quijote swears to take on the self-abnegating life of the Marqués de Mantua, even if it means

not eating bread from tablecloths, Sancho confronts his master with his absurd proposition:

> ¿Hase de cumplir el juramento, a despecho de tantos inconvenientes e incomodidades, como será el dormir vestido, y el no dormir en poblado, y otras mil penitencias que contenía el juramento de aquel loco viejo del marqués de Mantua, que vuestra merced quiere revalidar ahora? (109; I, x)

Feeling the threat of countless days spent in physical discomfort, Sancho reacts in a manner similar to that of Teresa when her interests are threatened. He brings Don Quijote face-to-face with the meaning of his words, with the hope that this will cause him to realize the senseless behavior expressed therein.

Another parallel between the language of the two relationships centers on the issue of linguistic accuracy. We have seen that Teresa's primary concern in language is producing meaning from the utterance in order to generate understanding in her response. When the meaning of an entire utterance is impeded by a word such as "ínsula," Teresa must ask about it before making a response. However, Teresa does not worry about inaccuracies if these do not impede the process of deriving meaning from context. Sancho, in his constant transposition of words and his mispronunciations, shows a similarly relaxed attitude about language. Don Quijote, however, so preoccupied with linguistic accuracy, never fails to take the opportunity to correct his squire. It is not always this rhetorical ideal which drives Don Quijote, however; sometimes it is nothing more than a roguish desire to use his power to dominate Sancho on the plane of linguistic norms:

> —No te entiendo, Sancho —dijo luego don Quijote—, pues no sé qué quiere decir soy *tan fócil.*
> —*Tan fócil* quiere decir —respondió Sancho—*soy tan así.*
> —Menos te entiendo agora —replicó don Quijote.
> —Pues si no me puede entender —respondió Sancho—, no sé cómo lo diga; no sé más, y Dios sea conmigo.
> —Ya, ya caigo —respondió don Quijote— en ello: tú quieres decir que eres tan *dócil*, blando y mañero, que tomarás lo que yo te dijere, y pasarás por lo que te enseñare.
> —Apostaré yo —dijo Sancho— que desde el emprincipio

> me caló y me entendió; sino que quiso turbarme, por oírme decir otras docientas patochadas.
> —Podrá ser —replicó don Quijote . . . . (625; II, vii)

Now, in the discussion about Sancho and Teresa's daughter, it is Teresa who uses the wrong word, and who but Sancho points out her error:

> —Yo no os entiendo, marido —replicó Teresa—; . . . Y si estáis revuelto en hacer lo que decís . . . .
> —*Resuelto* has de decir, mujer —dijo Sancho—, y no re*vuelto*.
> —No os pongáis a disputar, marido, conmigo —respondió Teresa—. Yo hablo como Dios es servido, y no me meto en más dibujos. (616; II, v)

Leo Spitzer describes this encounter in the following way:

> It may happen that the same Sancho, the advocate of naturalness in language, turns purist for the moment for the edification of his wife, and corrects her revuelto [revolved] to resuelto [resolved] (2.5); but then he must hear from her lips—oh, relativity of human things!—the same reproach he was wont to administer to his master: " . . . [Don't start a quarrel with me, husband, I talk as God pleases, and I don't worry about using fancy words]." (18-19)

Sancho has learned from his master this technique for achieving a dominant position, and so he moves his discussion with Teresa along the axis of linguistic accuracy where he knows she cannot prevail. Of course, as Spitzer notes, she clearly rejects this repositioning of their discourse in the same way that Sancho rejects it in his discussions with Don Quijote. Although Teresa is perhaps temporarily distracted by Sancho's admonishment, she then invalidates his attempt to subdue her through language.

An impatient desire for information on the part of Teresa highlights another interesting similarity between the language of the two pairs. We have already shown that Teresa's requests demonstrate an assertive attitude. Her questions have a similar character of assertiveness, with the added dimension of an undisciplined eagerness.

This is well illustrated when Teresa greets Sancho as he arrives home from his first set of adventures:

> — . . . *¿Qué bien habéis sacado de vuestras escuderías? ¿Qué saboyana me traéis a mí? ¿Qué zapaticos a vuestros hijos?*
> —No traigo nada deso —dijo Sancho—, mujer mía, aunque traigo otras cosas de más momento y consideración.
> —Deso recibo yo mucho gusto —respondió la mujer . . . . (556; I, lii, emphasis mine)

Sancho tends to display the same type of avid curiosity and eagerness for answers with Don Quijote. All we have to do is think of how he reacts when he finds out about the balsam of Fierabrás, one drop of which, Don Quijote claims, would save time and medicine:

> —*¿Qué redoma y qué bálsamo es ése?* —dijo Sancho Panza.
> —Es un bálsamo —respondió don Quijote— de quien tengo la receta en la memoria . . . . Con menos de tres reales se pueden hacer tres azumbres . . . .
> —¡Pecador de mí! —replicó Sancho—. *¿Pues a qué aguarda vuestra merced a hacelle y a enseñármele?*
> —Calla, amigo —respondió don Quijote . . . . (107-108; I, x, emphasis mine)

Don Quijote, that lover of self-discipline, always attempts to control this behavior of Sancho's by admonishing him and making him wait for what he wants. Similarly, we see Sancho exhibit the same desire to impose discipline on his wife, such as he would never be content to experience. His response to her request to show her the things he has brought home is: "—En casa os las mostraré, mujer —dijo Panza—, y por agora estad contenta . . ." (556; I, lii). When she asks what an "ínsula" is he replies: "—. . . a su tiempo lo verás, mujer . . ." (556; I, lii). And when she asks "—¿Qué es lo que decís, Sancho, de señorías, ínsulas y vasallos?" he answers: "—No te acucies, Juana, por saber todo esto tan apriesa; basta que te digo verdad, y cose la boca" (557; I, lii).

One final interesting parallel found in the language of these pairs becomes evident in the way in which Sancho verbally abuses his wife. Determined to win the battle for control over his daughter's

future, he resorts to this technique to try to undermine Teresa's solid positioning, which she has achieved with convincing arguments based on the logic of her human experience. When he cannot counter logic with logic, he resorts to name-calling (613-14; II, v): "Calla, boba"; "Ven acá, bestia y mujer de Barrabás"; "¿No te parece, animalia . . . ?" He also tries to manipulate Teresa by making her think that her disagreement results from a lack of understanding. Essentially he tries to delegitimize her voice in the argument by claiming that it is the voice of ignorance: "Ven acá, mentecata e ignorante, que así te puedo llamar, pues no entiendes mis razones y vas huyendo de la dicha" (615; II, v). He perceives the incongruity of his arguments, but with his passions all aflame and his behavior out of control, he is already too invested in his position. He finally resorts to projecting his own irrational behavior onto Teresa:

> —Ahora digo —replicó Sancho— que tienes algún familiar en ese cuerpo. ¡Válate Dios la mujer, y qué de cosas has ensartado unas en otras, sin tener pies ni cabeza! ¿Qué tiene que ver el Cascajo, los broches, los refranes y el entono con lo que yo digo? (615; II, v)

It is clear in this case, as in the one in which Sancho becomes a linguistic purist, that Sancho has learned these techniques from his master. We have seen Don Quijote use them to control Sancho whenever Sancho's observations and arguments were inconvenient for him, that is, whenever they threatened his interests. Don Quijote, too, resorts to name-calling: "villano ruin que sois" (205; I, xx); "—Ahora te digo, Sanchuelo, que eres el mayor bellacuelo que hay en España" (414; I, xxxvii); and "hideputa bellaco" (332; I, xxx). He delegitimizes Sancho's arguments by claiming that Sancho is uninformed: "—Bien parece —respondió don Quijote— que no estás cursado en esto de las aventuras . . . ." (88-89; I, viii). And onto Sancho he projects his own fear:"ellos son gigantes; y si tienes miedo, quítate de ahí" (89; I, viii); and his own madness:"—Y qué es lo que dices, loco? —replicó don Quijote—. ¿Estás en tu seso?" (411; I, xxxvii).

Don Quijote must use these techniques in order to defend his fantastic vision of the Golden Age from the encroachment of reality, which Sancho consistently tries to impose. Sancho must also resort to them in order to defend from the logical arguments of his wife a vision

as hopelessly fantastic as that of him as governor marrying off his daughter to nobles. In both of these cases, the one who wrests power does so at some cost to the relationship. In the case of Don Quijote, it costs him Sancho's loyalty which influences Sancho to engage in his own games of deception against his master. In the case of Sancho with Teresa, in the short term he has forfeited the solid peace of mind which accompanies the making of a decision based on mutual consent:

> —. . . Vos haced lo que quisiéredes, ora la hagáis duquesa, o princesa; pero séos decir que no será ello con voluntad ni consentimiento mío . . . . (614; II, v)

He has also lost Teresa's respect, and thereby reinspired her cynicism with regard to the husband/wife relationship:

> —El día que yo la viere condesa —respondió Teresa—, ése haré cuenta que la entierro; pero otra vez os digo que hagáis lo que os diere gusto; que con esta carga nacemos las mujeres, de estar obedientes a sus maridos, aunque sean unos porros. (617; II, v)

In the long term, such pessimism about her role in her marriage to Sancho will serve to weaken that relationship.

As we have seen in our analysis of language, the balance of power and control realized in Sancho's and Teresa's conversations suggests that Teresa is not the typically passive, obedient wife. Nor is their relationship the well-defined one which the labels "husband" and "wife," charged with their social implications, connote. Teresa herself alludes to this: "Siempre, hermano, fui amiga de la igualdad, y no puedo ver entonos sin fundamentos" (614; II, v). Indeed, Teresa's language indicates that she, in fact, does exercise quite a bit of control in the relationship, in spite of her husband's desperate attempts to use gender roles to establish linguistic dominance. We see a similar struggle, waged along the axis of social class rather than gender, mirrored in the relationship between Don Quijote and Sancho. Our familiarity with this conflict would never allow us to categorize Sancho as a mere object of Don Quijote's desire to relive the Golden Age. The parallels we have identified between the two conflicts should similarly prevent us from categorizing Teresa as such. As a fully realized subject, she engages in a power struggle which, no less than

that between Don Quijote and Sancho, is significant. It constitutes an essential part of Cervantes' masterful presentation of a "universe resistant to mechanism, dualism, and dominance thinking . . . a level of reality that escapes naming and definition" (El Saffar, "Confessions" 269).

Note

[1] Ruth El Saffar confesses: "What interested me in 1970 about Cervantes and continues to attract my attention now is less the generic question of literary convention than the psychological one of how one manages one's relationship to power" ("Confessions" 261).

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