

Two readings of Quixote: Cajal and Turgenev

L. C. Triarhou

Laboratory of Theoretical and Applied Neuroscience, University of Macedonia, Thessalonica, Greece.

ABSTRACT

This article juxtaposes two impressions of ‘*The ingenious gentleman of La Mancha*’ by Spanish histologist Santiago Ramón y Cajal (1905), one of the greatest minds in neuroanatomy, and by Russian novelist Ivan Turgenev (1860), known among neuroanatomists for having the largest brain recorded among eminent men. In a remarkable convergence, the two scholars echo parallel conceptions of the Cervantean epos as a compendium of human life. Quixote represents the pinnacle of honour and altruism, and a ‘knock’ to contemporary materialism, through his devotion to truth, beauty and virtue. Turgenev contrasts him with Hamlet: these antipodal ‘eternal human types’ constitute psychological components blending in every individual to form the personality. For Cajal, Quixotic loyalty to duty must be at the epicentre of any true science, the most laudable ambition imbued with universal love. For Turgenev, love is the only valid law, not as a simple emotion, but as the truth of existence.

KEYWORDS

Santiago Ramón y Cajal, Ivan Sergeyevich Turgenev, Don Quixote quatercentenary, critical essay, history of neurosciences

Introduction

The ingenious *Hidalgo* (1605) and *Caballero* (1615) *Don Quijote de La Mancha* are entering their fifth century of being.¹ In this paper I relate two genuine impressions of the timeless classic. The first, by one of the greatest minds in neuroanatomy,^{2,3} Spanish histologist Santiago Ramón y Cajal (1852–1934), doctor *honoris causa* (1894) of the University of Cambridge. The other, by one of the largest human brains on record in neuroanatomy,^{4,5} Russian novelist and playwright Ivan S. Turgenev (1818–1883), doctor *honoris causa* (1879) of the University of Oxford (Figure 1).

Cajal read his lecture on 9 May 1905 at the Medical College of San Carlos in Madrid, during the festivities marking the tricentenary of the début of the *Hidalgo*, and the year before receiving his Nobel Prize in physiology or medicine.⁷ Turgenev, having finalised his

manuscript on 28 December 1859, read it before the Society for the Patronage of Indigent Writers and Scientists in Saint Petersburg on 10 January 1860 (Cajal was almost 8 years old then); the transcript of the conference was published in Nikolai A. Nekrasov’s gazette *Sovremennik* (‘The Contemporary’) in the same month.⁸ Turgenev repeated the lecture at gatherings of the Society at the request of members and the public.

In 1944, the publisher José García Perona of Madrid had the good sense to supplement a little hardcover book of opinions on women, penned by the celebrated Don Santiago, with Cajal’s most interesting —and at the time much ignored— literary work on *Don Quixote and Quixotism*. The editor of the volume, Eduardo Arriaga, felt the essay was worth circulating because it was “a mighty knock, a romantic fustigator of the awkward materialism that has been reigning in recent times”.⁹

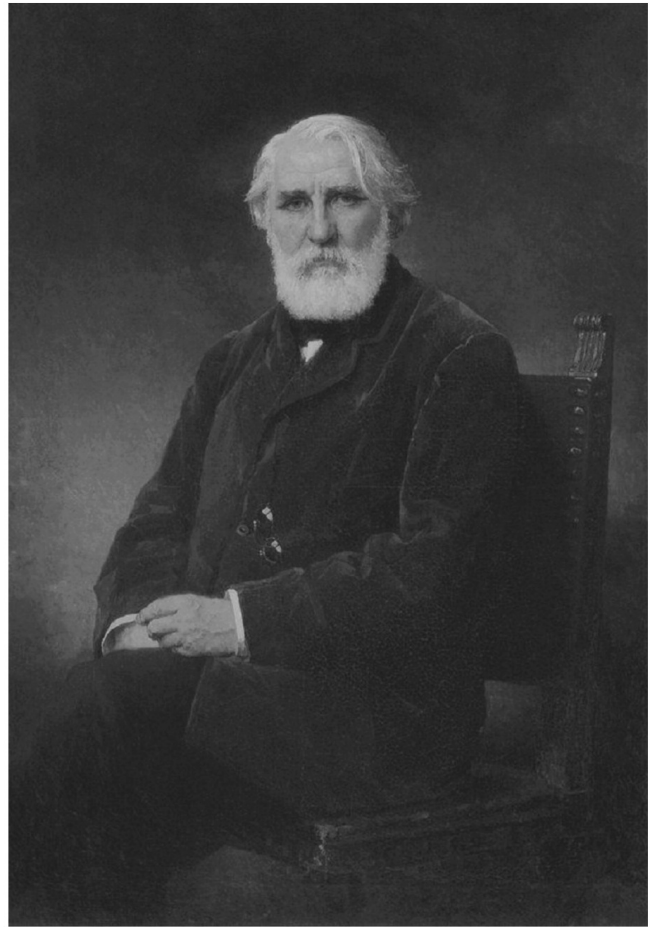
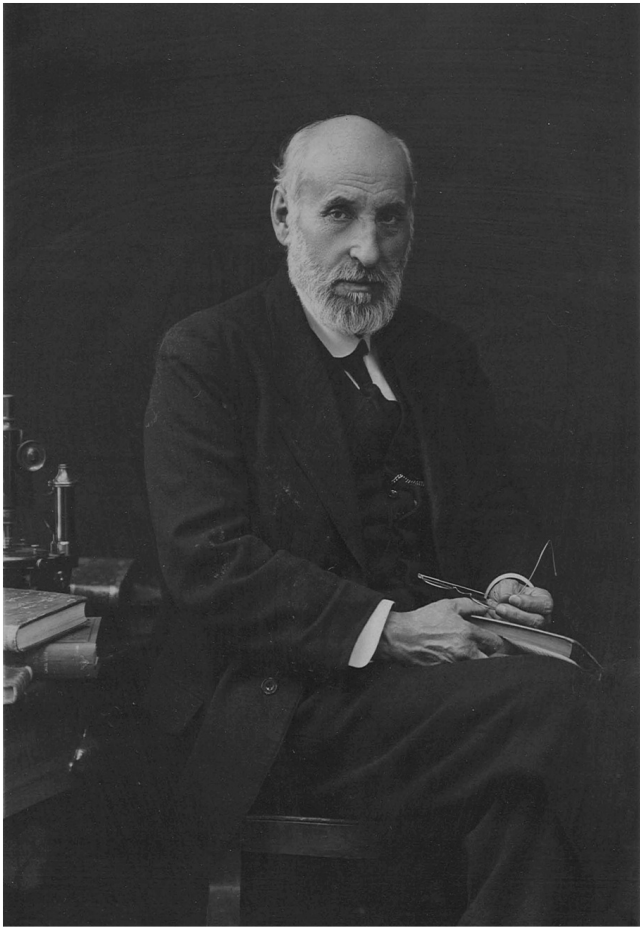


Figure 1. Studio photo of Ramón y Cajal by José Padró (1900–1931), dated 1922, left. Oil on canvas painting of Ivan Turgenev by Alexei A. Harlamoff (1840–1925), dated 1875, right. Sources: Cajal, Instituto de Investigaciones Oftalmológicas Ramón Castroviejo, Madrid [<http://biblioteca.ucm.es>]; Turgenev, The State Russian Museum, Saint Petersburg [<http://www.liveinternet.ru/users/bo4kameda/post340071473>].

English translations of the two lectures were completed in the 1960s^{10,11} and more recently.^{12,13}

Cajal's incorrigible idealism

The English physician and barrister-at-law J.H. Harley Williams (1901-1974), who had served as Medical Commissioner of the National Association for the Prevention of Tuberculosis and Director General of the Chest and Heart Association of Great Britain, justly proclaimed Cajal, the devoted explorer of the infinitely small who identified with the tenets of *quijotismo* and made them deeds, “Don Quixote of the microscope”.¹⁴

Psychiatric interpretations of Quixote were common around the turn of the century. For example, the President of the Aragonese Medical-Surgical Academy, Ricardo Royo Villanova (1868-1943), later Rector of the University of Zaragoza (1913-1928), delivered a lecture in 1905 describing, inter alia, the morphological, physical and mental signs, morbid acts, kinaesthetic states, psychosensory disturbances, delirious ideas, causes, and outcome of the insanity of Don Quixote “in the light of science”.¹⁵

Following his habit of not relying on either memory or improvisation, Cajal read his 1905 address, which was a triumph according to the newspapers. The speech

exemplified the Cajalian spirit in the best possible manner; it evinced the lecturer's deep love for science and unique vision of Spanish culture.¹⁶ Moreover, it offered a fresh outlook on the hero of Cervantes which became highly appreciated by educators over the following decades.¹⁷

Cajal discovered *Don Quixote* at the age of 11 years. In the beginning he "was not yet in a position to fully appreciate the supreme worth of the inestimable jewel of Cervantes" and disliked the damaged state in which the valiant knight emerged from nearly all his quarrels and adventures; its profoundly realistic viewpoint was contrary to the young boy's "incurable idealism".¹⁸ The initial impression dissipated over time, such that he would repeatedly cite Cervantes' immortal opus in his own literary works. Cajal concurred with the view that Quixote was not a madman, but a gentleman with solid ideas, who had consciously elected to be madly loyal to his convictions and duties. In his discourse, Cajal considers the *Hidalgo* "an ideal of humanity, magnificence, and justice", and suggests that those values, instead of being signs of illness, ought to be always engaged in any true science.^{19,20}

In his memoirs, Cajal recalls how he was able to grasp the central idea behind the tremendous conception of Cervantes:

To banish the follies and extravagances of the novels of chivalry so as to found artistic work upon the solid groundwork of experience. In the long run, only the artistic narratives of probable events, ingeniously interwoven with elements of actual life, attain the lofty privilege of teaching, edifying, and pleasing.¹⁸

In the third chapter of his *Precepts and counsels on scientific investigation*,²¹ in which he discusses the ethical merits of the research scientist, Cajal refers to *Don Quixote* in a couple of instances. He initially reiterates the view of the French physiologist Charles Richet (1850-1935) that the man of genius combines the idealism of Quixote with the good sense of Sancho. Likewise,

the researcher must display some of that felicitous combination of attributes, that is, an artistic temperament which impels one to pursue and observe the numbers, the beauty and the harmony of things, coupled with a healthy critical mind, able to reject rash impulses of conceit and instead maintain—in the struggle for life that ideas thrust

upon our brain— those thoughts which most faithfully embrace objective reality.²¹

Cajal goes on to defend a common truth: to a greater or lesser extent, the eagerness for approval and praise moves every person, in particular, anyone endowed with a generous heart and acute mind.

Individuals seek fame along different trails; some march with arms, as relayed by Cervantes in *Don Quixote*, aspiring to advance the political greatness of their motherland; others travel the road of art, eagerly seeking the ready applause of crowds who comprehend beauty easier than verity. It is only a few in every country, especially in more cultured nations, that follow the path of scientific research, the only course that can lead to the rational and valid explanation of the human creature and the nature that surrounds him.²¹

Cajal abides by the idea that such an ambition is "one of the noblest and most laudable that one might pursue, because, perhaps, more than any other, it is imbued with the fragrance of universal love and beneficence". Furthermore, "correcting the vices and mental defects of the Spanish race would be an act of sublime pedagogy and true regeneration".⁶

Quixote represents "the most perfect symbol of honour and altruism...the most exquisite personification of sublime abnegation..." ever created. The protagonist sallied forth on a campaign to "right the wrongs, correct the abuses, and redress the grievances".⁶

All great dreamers aspire to realising their dreams and to vesting their chimeras in flesh and blood by launching on the world a human type different from and superior to the current type....This important psychological law, well understood by Cervantes, becomes fulfilled in *Don Quixote*....During his ardent apostolate, he will not resort to suggestion and miracle (those dialectical resources of the meek religious propagandist), but, instead, to the forces of contradiction and the rigour of the blade. No cowardly compromise with the insidiousness and iniquities of the powerful. Consciences are made of hard rock and they should be sculpted with thrusts from the lance.⁶

...Had Cervantes not added certain pathological characteristics to such an admirable incarnation of religion, duty and altruism, then Quixote's type... would have been reduced to the modest proportions of a practical philosopher.... Wanting to fence against the books of knighthood with the potent sabre of ridicule, he tarnished and curtailed the amiable figure of the ingenious *Hidalgo* with a

stigma of insanity, his astute and spirited *noûs* becoming prey to and the plaything of illusions, hallucinations, obsessions and delirious ideas.⁶

“And we wonder”, inquires Cajal, “with restlessness in our soul and tears in our eyes: What? Would all lofty idealism of science, philosophy and politics be also condemned to perish irremissibly? Is it only reserved for dementia to confront grand heroism and great humanitarian endeavours?” (Figure 2).

Just like in the cinematograph of human consciousness, so in the immortal novel, pleasure and dolour, these two antipodal and alternating emotions, succeed each other, faithfully reflecting life.

What a great alarm for the soul, and an instigator of energy, is pain! Similarly to the shoals of sea sparkles (*Noctiluca scintillans*), whose luminescence increases at the shock of the naval propeller, inert neurons only ignite their light under the whip of painful emotions”.⁶

Cajal repeated this dictum in his thoughts on genius, talent, and foolishness in *Charlas de café*:

Naturalists tell that the *Noctiluca scintillans*, a minuscule dinoflagellate to which sea waves owe the mysterious luminescence, increases its brilliance notably when brutally excited. The same happens with many persons: their astuteness is revealed only when they become indignant.²²

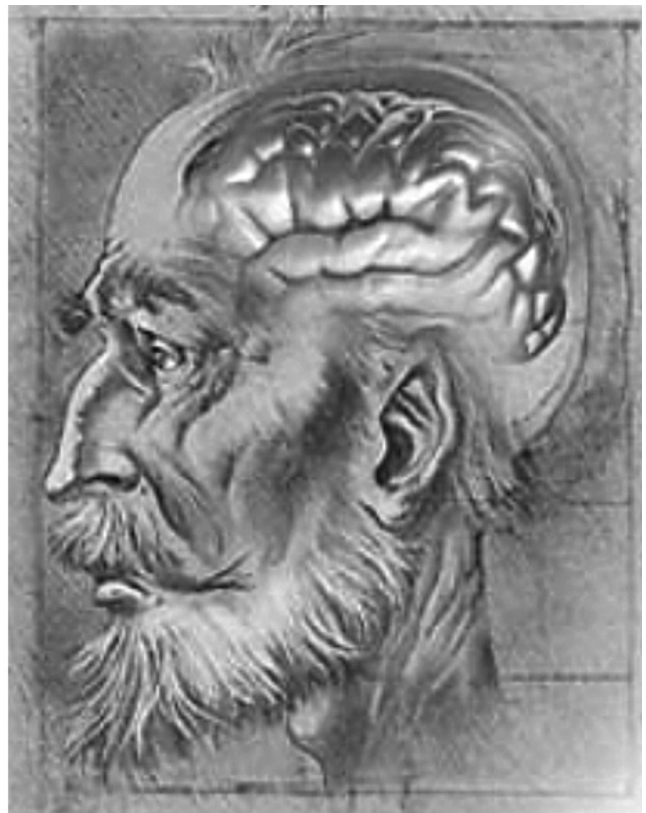
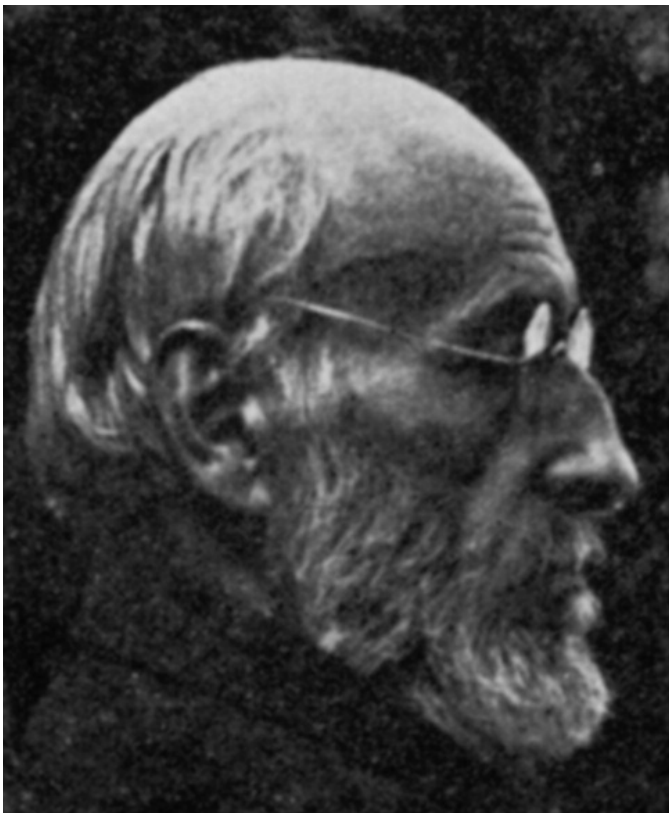


Figure 2. Don Santiago contemplates Don Quixote: «Arduous and rather hard questions, for the solution of which it would be indispensable to understand all the gyri and sulci of the complicated mind of Don Miguel» (Ramón y Cajal, 1905). Sources: Cajal photo, Royal National Library of Denmark and Copenhagen University Library [<http://www.kb.dk/images/billed/2010/okt/billeder/object146612/en/>]; Quixote sketch, Muy Interesante e-gazette, Madrid [<http://www.muyinteresante.es/tag/locura>].

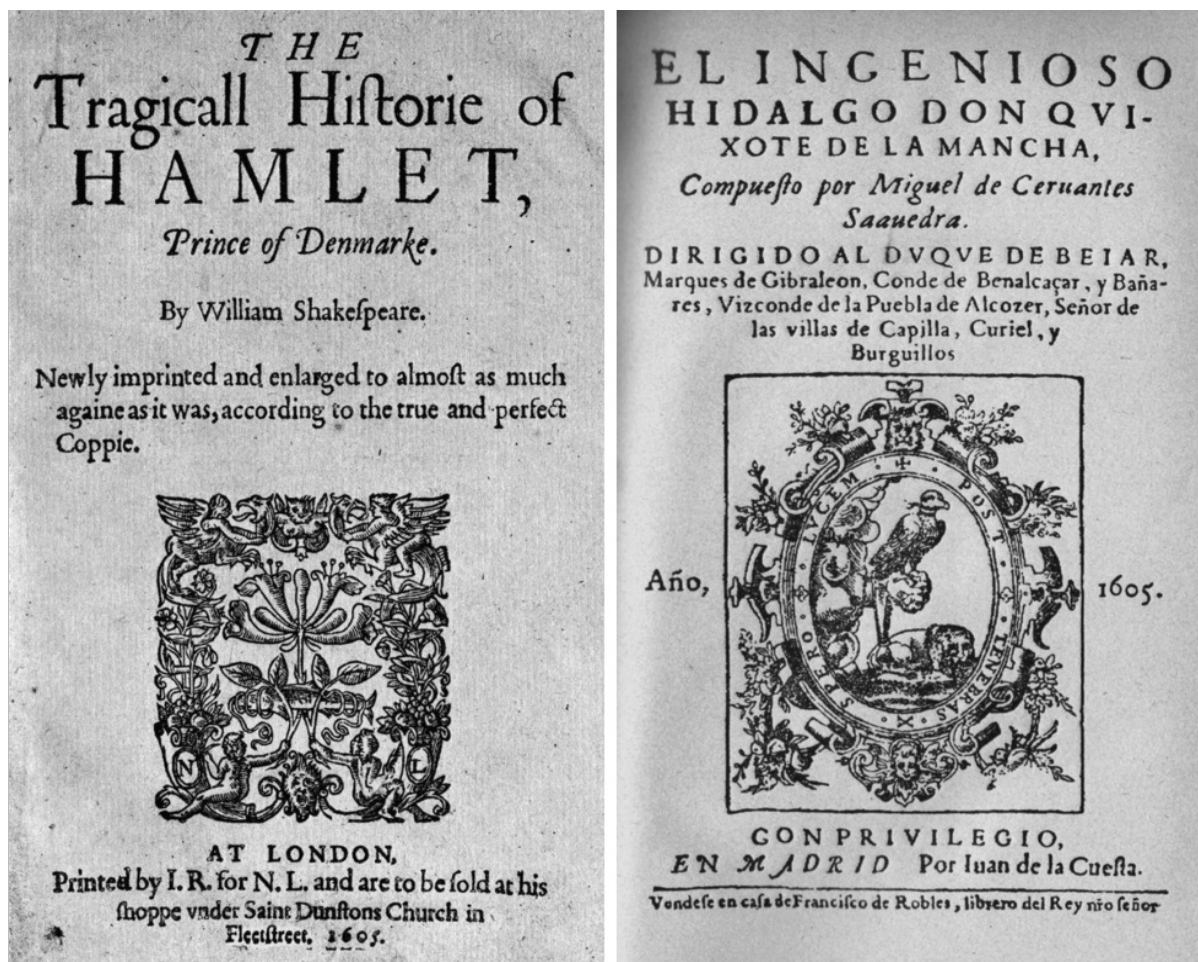


Figure 3. Title pages of the 1605 editions of William Shakespeare's Hamlet and Miguel de Cervantes' Don Quixote. Sources: Shakespeare [http://farm7.staticflickr.com/6201/6112444492_8f16d9cdaa_o.jpg]; Cervantes [<http://www.pinterest.com/pin/395683517233686128>].

Perhaps the privileged cerebrum of Cervantes, in order to attain the tone and ebullience of the sublime inspiration, similarly necessitated the pointed spur of pain and desolating spectacle of misery.⁶

It is the humoresque of Sancho Panza which consoles the spirit of Cervantes. Through such emotional compensation, the writer keeps his mind serene and his imagination lively and plastic. The picturesque and delightful Squire renders the overwhelming burden of anguish and misfortune tolerable. What else could he represent, but the “emotional artistic counterpoise of the querulous and wretched *Caballero* of the Rueful Countenance”?⁶

Only later did I learn to appreciate at its true worth the marvellous harmony resulting from the contrast between the superb types of Don Quixote and Sancho, personages who, as has often been said, while loftily ideal, are the most real and universal imaginable, because they symbolise and incarnate the two extremes of human thought and feeling.¹⁸

The fictitious personalities transcend the boundaries of the fable and invade real life. As a matter of fact, the Cervantean *epos* is a summary and compendium of human life. Thus, it was only natural that the ‘pen happy knight-errant of neurology’ could not have refrained from commenting on the state of contemporary Quixotism, as he saw it and as he would have wished it.²³

Altruistic apostles of peace and social beatitude, true Quixotes feel inflamed by the love of justice, for the triumph of which they sacrifice, unwavering, their very existence, evermore the appetites and delights of sensibility. In all their acts and tendencies they aim not within, in the low regions of some concupiscent soul, but at the spirit of the collective personality, of which they recognise themselves as humble and unselfish cells.⁶

The salient Quixotic characteristics of “devouring thirst for glory, the contempt of life, and the healthy ambition for power and authority”,⁶ are passions which temper and ennoble the character. As if emanating directly from Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives*, the vigour of the untamed will and the yearning for renown constitute navigating forces.

Thus, legitimate Quixotry,...purified from the filth of ignorance and the outrage of insanity, may find a wide field of applications in Spain:...deracinating and converting into a delightful and productive garden the impenetrable forest of Nature...; modeling and correcting our own brain with the chisel of intense culture, such that we may render a copious harvest of new ideas and inventions, beneficial for the growth and prosperity of life in all spheres of human activity...⁶

Turgenev’s psychological existentialism

What defines Turgenev, a fine stylist, is the Hegelian background of his literary production and his courage in denouncing the oppression of the working class in his time. The critical essay *Hamlet and Don Quixote* — “the two eternal human types”— contrasts the two works, which had appeared concurrently (Figure 3); their authors even died 11 days apart (Cervantes on Friday 22 April 1616; Shakespeare on Tuesday 3 May 1616). In *Hamlet and Don Quixote*, Turgenev contrasts the personalities of the two characters as the psychological components which, in every person, blend to a greater or lesser extent to form human nature.

The year 1860 witnessed the publication by Turgenev of one of his finest novellas, *First Love*, based on bittersweet childhood memories, and the delivery of his lecture on *Hamlet and Don Quixote*. (Fyodor Dostoevsky, having just returned from his Siberian exile, attended that conference; the tragic hero in *The*

Idiot, 1869, resembles Quixote in several ways²⁴). The idea of man torn between Hamlet’s egocentric scepticism and Quixote’s idealistic generosity seems to pervade Turgenev’s own stories.

Turgenev writes that all people live, consciously or unconsciously, on the basis of their ideals, certain principles that they do not doubt, by virtue of what they perceive as truth, beauty, virtue. Many embrace their ideals by neither pondering on them nor questioning them; some subject them to analysis on the grounds of their own way of reasoning. In individuals of the Hamlet type the ideals exist inside; in people of the Quixote type the ideals exist outside them.

In his text, Turgenev brings to the surface a belief in something eternal, a truth that calls for attainable sacrifice. Quixote is devoted to an ideal; for that ideal he is able to suffer agony and sacrifice his life, since life has meaning only as a way of reaching the ideal and establishing justice in the world. Thus, Turgenev emphasises Quixote’s freedom of deeds, the moral power of his spirit, the integrity of his personality and character, clear objective, perseverance, persistence and will.

Turgenev’s world-view, as contained in his article, offers an avant-garde interpretation of Quixote which played a key role in his literary career and made an important contribution to the study of Cervantes in 19th-century Russia. The psychological ideal proposed by Turgenev in his interpretation of Quixote challenges the commonly held view of Turgenev as a pessimist.²⁵ Rather, the writer has always sought to remedy human relations through a passionate love of life and fellow beings, and through a constant nostalgia for an ideal that takes the form of a better order in human nature. To the existential anguish of Hamlet, he steadily opposes the zest of Quixote.

Towards the end of the essay, Turgenev hints that the hero of Cervantes is one of those people destined for great things; without them, humanity would make no progress, and the various Hamlets would have nothing to contemplate: “Quixotes discover, Hamlets scrutinise”. The analogies between the behaviour of the *Caballero* and the *Gentleman* might logically have led Turgenev to conclude that Quixote is an English type, who, in the romantic perspective of national mentalities (North versus South), went against his own words.

Moreover, a non-battered Quixote would have meant little to Turgenev. Turgenev believed that the law of love is the only valid law; love not merely as an emotion, but as a manner of being, as the truth of existence. In that context, he drew analogies between Cervantes' hero and Christ (Turgenev considered Christ, divinity aside, a revolutionary).²⁶ The fulfilment of Quixote's existence rests on the priorities of humanity, not individual events. All shall pass, all shall vanish; high ranks, power, unparalleled genius, all shall crumble to dust. But good deeds shall not dissipate in smoke. They are more enduring than the most resplendent beauty: "Love shall abide forever", saith Paul the Apostle, "all other shall pass away".²⁷

Also contrasting *Hamlet* and *Don Quixote* was the Welsh writer and painter Leonardo Williams (1871-1934), correspondent for *The Times* in Madrid and a corresponding member of the Royal Spanish Academy.²⁸ Williams conveyed that the creation of a character whose personal interest can match or exceed that of its creator is the unique prerogative of only the greatest masters of fiction. Such is the case with Homer, Dante, Velázquez, Cervantes and Shakespeare. (Certainly, the celebrated paintings of the great Don Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez gain the better part in his posterity compared to his fiction stories, such as *The Triumph of Bacchus*, appearing as a bunch of drunks well way from the ancient deity, and *The Forge of Vulcan*, whose characters seem to have come from a modern fitness room rather than around a divinity). Furthermore, in a small world whose characteristic is its tranquillity, only the criminal or the insane can slough off the epidermis of society and bring about true progress. Since, in the case of Cervantes, the criminal was inadmissible, Quixote had to be mad. Nonetheless, as a complement to Quixote the Spaniard, we have a Quixote whose character is simultaneously regional and extraterritorial, who is like a brother to us all. One realises that both the Prince of Denmark and the Gentleman of La Mancha are fragile and exquisitely human. Quixote has been called "the symbol of faith". In the same analogy, Hamlet is "the symbol of doubt". And faith and doubt together sustain the world in balance, asserts Williams.²⁹

Drawing a parallel between Shakespeare and Cervantes, Turgenev juxtaposes points of difference and elements of likeness: "I simply wished to point out the two different attitudes of man to his ideal. These two

different relations were embodied in the two heroes I selected".⁸

The Argentinian writer, Bernardo Verbitsky (1907-1979), born to Russian immigrant parents, also published an essay titled *Hamlet and Don Quixote* a century after Turgenev.³⁰ In his essay, Verbitsky affirms the similarities between the two characters, Hamlet and Quixote, and transfers the life experiences of Shakespeare and Cervantes to their heroes; he considers Hamlet, like Quixote, a man with a different kind of sensibility, whose actions are not always understood.³¹

In Cervantes we shall not find Shakespeare's witty wordiness, beheadings, extracted eyes, bloodsheds, that iron and nonsensical harshness, the savage heirloom of the Middle Ages, the barbarism which slowly quenches the obstinate Northern natures.⁸

Cervantes draws his wealth from his own soul, which is radiant, straightforward, rich with life's experience, and yet not stiffened by it. It was not in vain that in the seven years of cruel captivity, Cervantes studied, as he told himself, the science of patience. Whatever engirdled him is tougher than Shakespeare's entourage, but in him, as in every human being, humanity is reflected in its totality.⁸

Quixote is not preoccupied with himself. Respecting his own person, as well as that of others, it never enters his mind to simulate. On the contrary, Hamlet, for all his courtly etiquette, appears as *ayant des airs de parvenu* (a 'poseur' or 'mocker' —French in the original); he is restless and abrupt, he pretends and scoffs. However, that is why he is endowed with the power of apt and original expression, a power inherent in any reflective personality —the depth and precision of analyses that are altogether unfathomable to Quixote.⁸

The principle of analysis carried Hamlet to the limits of the tragical; the principle of enthusiasm carried Quixote to the limits of the comical. In real life, however, one seldom encounters absolute comedy or absolute tragedy.

The simultaneous appearance of *Don Quixote* and *Hamlet* seemed to Turgenev an extraordinary event. In these two heroes, he discerns the embodiment of two elemental poles of human nature. All humans, to his mind, belong, more or less, to one of these two psychological types. By the wise dispensation of nature,

there exist neither absolute Hamlets nor absolute Quixotes: these are simply the extreme manifestations of two opposite tendencies, guide-posts defined by the poets on two different paths.⁸

The spirit that created the paragon of *Hamlet* is that of a man of the North, a spirit of reflection, a spirit difficult and brooding, wanting in either harmony or bright colour, not clad in delicate, small forms, but cogitative, strong, polymorphous, self-contained, guiding.⁸

The consciousness of Quixote represents the spirit of a man of the South, a spirit bright, merry, innocent, receptive, one that does not delve deeply into life, that does not wish to enfold life's phenomena, but rather reflects them all.⁸

What does Quixote symbolise? Faith, first of all, in something eternal, immutable; in short, faith in the truth, which exists outside the individual human being, which presumes constant diaconate and self-abnegation. Turgenev's *Don Quixote* is totally permeated by his devotion to the ideal. His will is unwavering. He considers it disgraceful to live for oneself and to be only concerned with oneself. He lives for others, for his brethren, for the eradication of evil. This 'deranged' knight-errant is the ultimate moral being on Earth, a deacon of his ideas, and, for that matter, he is encircled in a halo.⁸

Lastly, in Sancho, Turgenev fathoms it is common sense that prevails, in tandem with an unconditional devotion which is free from any expectation of payoff or personal gain. Like Sancho, Quixote does not covet any reward either, other than grateful remembrance by posterity; according to Cajal,⁶ he is solely yielding to the inevitable rules of courtesy and good upbringing.

Thanking his audience, Turgenev concludes:

"I shall consider myself fortunate if, by an indication of those two radically different directions of the human mind, I could awaken certain reflections, even discordant to mine".⁸

Conclusion

At first glance, one might perceive an apparent paradox or even a lack of a solid link between Neuroscience proper and the focus of the present discussion, as no real basic or practical neurobiological data have been sought or displayed. Nonetheless, Quixote is such a

universal character that his values find applicability in any field, in the scientific and the artistic arenas alike. For this reason, he was a source of inspiration and a model for Cajal, and an outstanding ideal close to his existential principles for Turgenev. Paralleling the views of the two distant, albeit magnificent thinkers, we detect in them an approximation with regard to Quixote: altruism and the faithful priority of his own principles over pervading materialistic tendencies, a true shock for 17th-century society, as much as for common values nowadays.

With a time distance of 45 years, but in a remarkable convergence, Don Santiago echoes the philosophy of Ivan Sergeyevich. The innovative readings by the two intellectuals resonate ideas unaccustomed within their cultural precincts (Figure 4). The commonplace opinion held that, with *Quixote*, Cervantes had mainly aimed at a parody of chivalrous tales. In Cajal's eye, the hero is a knight whose actions are insane but whose words are sage; in his act, the *Hidalgo* denounces the decay of society, *pari passu* suggesting every possible outlet. In a Cajalian antecedent, Turgenev eyes Quixote not merely as the *Caballero of the Rueful Countenance*, a figure created to satirise medieval knighthood romance: especially in the 1615 sequel, rather than a comical and ridiculed buffoon, Quixote is the thoughtful peer of Dukes and Duchesses and the wise mentor of the Squire-Governor.⁸

In his Russia, Turgenev had to overcome the traditional setting which prevailed at the time: Russian readers of the 18th and the early 19th century perceived Quixote in a rather negative light, as an insecure and turbid character.³² The very name of *Kihot* was too often substituted for a jester, even a mocking epithet on the lips of Russian peasants, with all the indicia of a caricature astride the cadaverous scrub-horse. In everyday parlance, the term 'Quixotism' was synonymous with romantic twaddle.

An interesting aspect in *Don Quixote* is freedom. For Cervantes, and for his alter ego, Quixote, "*La libertad Sancho es uno de los más preciosos dones que a los hombres dieron los cielos*" (Freedom, Sancho, is one of the most precious gifts given to men by the heavens)¹. This idea is capital and may serve as the foreground and main underpinning of Quixote's encouraging behaviour. Only having freedom can men be devoted to such ideals and overcome vested interests. And



Figure 4. «The quality and manner of life of the renowned Don Quixote de La Mancha» by Salvador Dalí, from *Illustrations for The Life and Achievements of the Renowned Don Quixote de La Mancha* (1945). Indian ink on paper, 252×196 mm. Detail from the frontispiece of the book *Don Quixote de La Mancha Ilustrado por Salvador Dalí* (Figures: Distribucions d'Art Surrealista; 2004).

freedom can be taken not only through imprisonment —which Cervantes experienced twice, in Seville and in Algeria— but also by servitude to sheer materialistic aims. Not surprisingly, the key of existentialism is also freedom. In *L'existencialisme est un humanisme*,³³ Jean-Paul Sartre emphasises that existentialism is not about quietism or pessimism, but about subjectivity and choices, which are *prima facts* in humans, such that choices are the exit, and freedom is the mean, a true gift. The result is that, thanks to such a freedom, one

can carve one's own life, a point linking Sartre to Cervantes, since in the Spanish writer's opinion, "*Cada hombre es hijo de sus obras*" (Every man is the son of his own works). For all these reasons, existentialism appears as real for Turgenev as for Cajal: having freedom, both pursued the ideals of Quixote, which embedded his vital trajectories and works. Thus, existentialism is either applied to both figures or is alternatively changed to a more specific term when it comes to Turgenev.

In Cajal's Spain, *Quijote* was occasionally a disdainful designation appended to locals by foreigners and some Spaniards, and the term 'Quixotism' qualified endeavours and aspirations crowned with failure, tenaciously fixed to an impossible past, incapable of adapting to reality. This is only part of the story. In Cajal's Spain, the most outstanding intellectuals were enthusiastic about Cervantes and devoted time and famous essays to him. Just to mention a few names, Benito Pérez Galdós, perhaps second in Spanish literature only to Cervantes himself, used Quixote and the life of Cervantes as a source of inspiration for his characters in both his realistic novels (*La desheredada*, 1881, or *Lo prohibido*, 1884-1885) and his spiritual ones (*Misericordia*, 1897); the crowning example was when, at the end of his life—already blind—he replicated the journey of Quixote across La Mancha.³⁴⁻³⁶ Likewise, José Ortega y Gasset's first book, *Meditaciones del Quijote*, and Miguel de Unamuno's *Vida de Don Quijote y Sancho* were published in 1914. Thus, Cajal was surrounded by an atmosphere of Quixote-devoted followers, with whom he actively exchanged ideas and correspondence.³⁷

Turgenev and Cajal the essayists abide by Goethe: "He who would wish to comprehend a poet, should betake himself to the poet's environment". Turgenev considered the translation of *Don Quixote* in Russian an extremely important affair and a true service to the public; he had even contemplated producing it himself. (Turgenev's knowledge of Spanish, thanks to his passionate love for the mezzo-soprano Pauline Viardot and contact with her family, who were of Spanish descent, sufficed for him to consider translating Cervantes into Russian. Between 1867 and 1869, Viardot composed three salon operas to libretti by Turgenev: *Trop de femmes*, *L'ogre*, and *Le dernier sorcier*³⁸). "Collective gratefulness awaits the writer who should furnish all the splendour of this nonpareil work".⁸

Turgenev comments: "Although it is true that, in our era, Hamlets have become far more common, and yet, Quixotes are by no means extinct". Cajal remarks: "Although it is painful to confess, we are forced to acknowledge that in today's Spain Sanchos abound, while Quixotes are often in shortage".⁶

Cajal does pinpoint the spiritual kinship between Quixote and his author, who must himself have shared

something or even much of the hero. To comprehend the arduous psychophysiological conditions that led *el príncipe de nuestros prosistas* (the Prince of our prose writers) to such a brilliant conception, Cajal delved into the dreary years of Cervantes the hero at Naupaktos (or Lepanto), mutilated upon first encounter, and the prisoner in the dismal chaos of the infected cell in the Sevillian underworld, out of which surged a new book—and a renewed man. Its pages offer us the synthesis of life: its light and shadows, its summits, its abysses. Cervantes characterises the annoyances that embitter the existence of he who lies in prison, where, in fact, "each incommodity reserves its seat and every outcry of misery its natural habitation".¹ Cajal adds: "Great disenchantments demagnetise the best focused wills and deform even the most incorruptible characters".⁶

Cajal concludes his essay on the *Psychology of Don Quixote* by exalting the study of History:

Considered from a moral point of view, nations are supreme compositions of common dreams and aspirations, the sublime blooming of a flora whose multiple rootlets become extended and nourished by all the hearts. I should willingly compare, as well, the great peoples to those poetic coral islands, which emerge from the sea amid imposing oceanic solitudes. If you contemplate them with the dreamy eyes of the artist, you will be captivated by the merry and placid shores festooned by white froth, by the pilgrim and fragrant flowers, the colossal trees whose crowns resemble a swaying chorus of celestial birds—thinking that such a paradise surged spontaneously from a strange caprice of Amphitrite; but study the sub-terrain with the reposed analysis of science, descend to the bed of the sea—which is as priceless as tracking History—and at the marvel of the colossal limestone buttress the work and the relics of myriads of infinitesimal and obscure beings: you shall then realize that all grandiose blooming above represents a secular and obstinate construction by innumerable and abnegated existences.⁶

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Acknowledgment

The author expresses his gratitude to the anonymous reviewers who generously provided constructive comments.

References

1. De Cervantes Saavedra M. *Don Quixote: the ingenious gentleman of La Mancha*. Ormsby J, tr. Norwalk (US): Easton Press; 1979.
2. Penfield W. The career of Ramón y Cajal. *Arch Neurol Psychiat*. 1926;16:213-20.
3. Sherrington CS. Santiago Ramón y Cajal 1852-1934. *Obit Notices Fellows Roy Soc*. 1935;1:424-41.
4. Brouardel PCH. Procès-verbal de l'autopsie de monsieur Yvan Tourguéneff, faite le 5 septembre 1883, par monsieur le Docteur Brouardel, professeur de médecine légale à la faculté de médecine de Paris, en présence du docteur Descoust, chef des travaux de médecine légale pratique à la faculté de médecine de Paris, du docteur Paul Segond, professeur agrégé de la faculté de médecine et chirurgien des hôpitaux de Paris et du docteur Magnin de Bougival. Paris: [s.l.]; 1883.
5. Spitzka EA. A study of the brain of the late Major J. W. Powell. *Am Anthropol*. 1903;5:585-643.
6. Ramón y Cajal S. *Psicología del Quijote y el quijotismo*. In: Sawa M, Becerra P, eds. *Crónica del centenario del don Quijote*. Madrid: Establecimiento Tipográfico de Antonio Marzo; 1905 [Triarhou LC, ed. *Cajal beyond the brain: Don Santiago contemplates the mind and its education*. Tesalónica: Corpus Callosum; 2015.]
7. Ramón y Cajal S. Structure et connexions des neurones: conférence Nobel faite à Stockholm le 12 décembre 1906. In: Hasselberg KB, Pettersson SO, Mörner KAH, Wirsén CD, Santesson MCG, eds. *Les prix Nobel en 1906*. Estocolmo: Imprimerie Royale P. A. Norstedt & Söner; 1908. p. 1-27.
8. Turguénev IS. Hamlet y don Quijote. Ballesteros VG, trans. *Nueva Revista*. 1998;56:158-74. [Turguenev IS. *Hamlet and Don Quixote*. Triantafyllidis DV, tr. Athens: Armos Editions; 2004.]
9. Ramón y Cajal S. *La mujer: psicología del Quijote y el quijotismo*. Madrid: J. G. Perona; 1944 [Triarhou LC, ed. *Cajal beyond the brain: Don Santiago contemplates the mind and its education*. Tesalónica: Corpus Callosum; 2015.]
10. Ramón y Cajal S. *Psychology of Don Quixote and quixotism*. In: Craigie EH, Gibson WC, eds. *The world of Ramón y Cajal: with selections from his nonscientific writings*. Springfield (US): Charles C. Thomas Publisher; 1968. p. 205-22.
11. Turguenev IS. Hamlet and Don Quixote. *Spiegel M*, trans. *Chicago Rev*. 1965;17:92-109.
12. Turguenev IS. Hamlet and Don Quixote: the two eternal human types. In: Bloom H, Foster B, eds. *Bloom's Shakespeare through the ages: Hamlet*. Nueva York: Infobase Publishing; 2008. p. 162-74.
13. Triarhou LC, ed. *Cajal beyond the brain: Don Santiago contemplates the mind and its education*. Tesalónica: Corpus Callosum; 2015.
14. Williams H. *Don Quixote of the microscope: an interpretation of the Spanish savant Santiago Ramón y Cajal (1852-1934)*. Londres: Jonathan Cape; 1954.
15. Villanova RR. *La locura de D. Quixote*. Zaragoza: Emilio Casañal; 1905.
16. Durán Muñoz G, Sánchez Duarte J. *Recopilaciones y estudios cajalianos: la psicología de los artistas, las estatuas en vida y otros ensayos inéditos o desconocidos de Santiago Ramón y Cajal*. Vitoria-Gasteiz: Industrias Gráficas Ortega; 1945.
17. Escribano Nevado A. Santiago Ramón y Cajal. *Revista de Segunda Enseñanza*. 1926;24:234-5.
18. Ramón y Cajal S. *Recuerdos de mi vida*, 3a ed. Madrid: Juan Pueyo; 1923. [Ramón y Cajal S. *Recollections of my life*. Craigie EH, Cano J, trans. Birmingham (US): The Classics of Neurology and Neurosurgery Library; 1988.]
19. Tabarés-Seisdedos R, Corral-Márquez R. Miguel de Cervantes, 1547-1616. *Am J Psychiatry*. 2001;158:1392.
20. Palma JA, Palma F. Neurology and Don Quixote. *Eur Neurol*. 2012;68:247-57.
21. Ramón y Cajal S. *Reglas y consejos sobre investigación científica: los tónicos de la voluntad*. 6a ed. Madrid: Juan Pueyo; 1923 [Precepts and counsels on scientific investigation: stimulants of the spirit. Sánchez-Pérez JM, Courville CB, eds.; Rockwood V, Nicolas C, trans. Mountain View (US): Pacific Press Publishing Association; 1951.]
22. Ramón y Cajal S. *Pensamientos escogidos*. Madrid: Cuadernos Literarios; 1924.
23. McMenemey WH. *The world of Ramón y Cajal, with selections from his nonscientific writings: by E. Horne Craigie and William C. Gibson*. *J Neurol Neurosurg Psychiatry*. 1969;32:254.
24. Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia [Internet]. San Francisco: Wikimedia Foundation; ©2015. Ivan Turguenev; 5 oct 2015 [accessed 10 Nov 2015]. Available from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ivan_Turgenev
25. Beaugregard J. I.S. Turguenev: Hamlet et Don Quichotte, variations sur un même thème [doctoral thesis]. Montreal: McGill University; 1980.
26. Zviguilsky A. Quelques sources possibles de "Hamlet et Don Quichotte" d'Ivan Turguenev. *Rev Etud Slaves*. 1969;48:109-16.
27. Primera carta a los corintios; 13:8. In: *Biblia Latinoamericana*, San Pablo; 1995. [The Holy Bible in Greek. Atenas: The Biblical Society; 1980].
28. *Andalupedia* [Internet]. Granada: Andalupedia; ©2013. Williams, Leonard; [accessed 10 Nov 2015]. Available from: http://www.andalupedia.es/p_termino_detalle.php?id_ter=20312
29. Williams L. Algunos intérpretes ingleses de Hamlet y el verdadero espíritu de Don Quijote de La Mancha: dos ensayos. Madrid: Biblioteca Nacional y Extranjera; 1904.
30. Verbitsky B. *Hamlet y Don Quijote*. Buenos Aires: Jamcana; 1964.
31. Foster DW, Verbitsky, Bernardo: Argentina, 1907-1979. In: Lockhart DB, ed. *Jewish writers of Latin America: a dictionary*. Abingdon-on-Thames (GB): Routledge; 1997. p. 553-64.

32. Müllerová D. To the Ivan S. Turgenev's essay Hamlet and Don Quixote. *Jazyk a Kultúra*. 2011;2:27-31.
33. Sartre J-P. *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*. París: Nagel; 1946.
34. Herman JC. *Don Quijote and the novels of Pérez Galdós*. Ada (US): East Central Oklahoma State College; 1955.
35. Cardona R. Cervantes y Galdós. *Letras de Deusto*. 1974;4:189-205.
36. Álvaro González LC. Lo Prohibido: la teoría de degeneración en lo literario, lo biológico y lo social. In: Arencibia Y, Quintana RA, eds. *Galdós y la gran novela del siglo XIX: IX Congreso Internacional Galdosiano*. Las Palmas: Ediciones del Cabildo Insular de Gran Canaria; 2011. p. 162-74.
37. Fernández Santarén JA. *Santiago Ramón y Cajal: epistolario*. Madrid: La Esfera de los Libros; 2014.
38. Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia [Internet]. San Francisco: Wikimedia Foundation; ©2015. Pauline Viardot; 2015 Jul 30 [accessed 10 Nov 2015]. Available from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pauline_Viardot