

Ortega y Gasset on the Alleged Inconvenience of Reading *Don Quixote* at School

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Abstract: This article presents the stance taken by José Ortega y Gasset in the debate that took place in early-twentieth-century Spain regarding the convenience of reading *Don Quixote* in schools. To this end, we start by describing, albeit briefly, the state of Ortega y Gasset's thought in 1920, when he writes *Biología y pedagogía*, the essay with which we shall concern ourselves. According to Ortega y Gasset, *Don Quixote* must not be read in the classroom because it does not contribute to the development of the students' spontaneous life, or *natura naturans*. In order to foster this development, Ortega y Gasset suggests leaving *Don Quixote* aside and resort to myths such as Odysseus or Heracles because their exploits would excite the students' vital pulse. However, we suggest several reasons why the aim stated by Ortega y Gasset—and several other highly valuable educational benefits—could be reached resorting to the reading of selected passages of *Don Quixote* instead of the feats of Odysseus and Heracles.

Keywords: Ortega y Gasset; *Don Quixote*; myth; Zozaya; Unamuno; philosophy of education; Spain; pedagogy.

[es] Ortega y Gasset sobre la supuesta inconveniencia de leer *Don Quijote* en la escuela

Resumen: Este artículo presenta la postura mantenida por José Ortega y Gasset en el debate que tuvo lugar en la España de comienzos del siglo veinte sobre la conveniencia de leer *Don Quijote* en las escuelas. Con este fin, comenzamos describiendo, si bien brevemente, el estado del pensamiento de Ortega y Gasset en 1920, cuando escribe *Biología y Pedagogía*, el ensayo del que nos ocuparemos aquí. Según Ortega y Gasset, *Don Quijote* no se debe leer en las aulas porque no contribuye al desarrollo de la vida espontánea o *natura naturans* de los estudiantes. Para fomentar este desarrollo, Ortega y Gasset sugiere dejar a un lado a *Don Quijote* y recurrir a mitos como Ulises o Hércules porque sus hazañas excitarían el pulso vital del alumnado. Sin embargo, sugerimos varias razones por las que el objetivo planteado por Ortega y Gasset—junto a algunos otros beneficios educativos de considerable valor—se podría alcanzar recurriendo a la lectura de determinados pasajes de *Don Quijote* en lugar de basarse en las gestas de Ulises y Hércules.

Palabras clave: Ortega y Gasset; *Don Quijote*; mito; Zozaya; Unamuno; filosofía de la educación; España; pedagogía.

Sumario: 1. Introduction; 2. Ortega y Gasset's Argument; 3. Reply to Ortega y Gasset: Why Odysseus and Heracles rather than *Don Quixote*?; 4. Conclusion; 5. Bibliographical references.

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1. Introduction

The first decades of the twentieth century saw the Spanish intelligentsia display an unprecedented concern with the reputation of *Don Quixote*. Preoccupation with the glories of national literature was of course not a new phenomenon in Spain or elsewhere³, but in a country still reeling from the recent loss of its last colonies this took on a quite urgent tone. Ever since late 1903, *El Imparcial* newspaper had been appealing for the commemoration of the third centenary of *Don Quixote* in 1905. This was in itself unusual, since the custom was to commemorate the anniversary of an author's birth or death⁴. It goes without saying that Cervantes and *Don Quixote* had never been forgotten or ignored, but the 1905 centenary inaugurated a revival of interest that would only increase during the following years. The 1905 celebrations included lectures by some of the most relevant Spanish authors and scholars of the day: thus, in May, Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo at the Central University of Madrid, Jacinto Octavio Picón at the Academy of Arts and Santiago Ramón y Cajal at the Medical College of San Carlos⁵. Some of the most important magazines, such as *Blanco y Negro* or *La Ilustración española y americana*, published special issues devoted to the centenary⁶. Education was not alien to the celebrations either: in March 1905, the Ministry for Public Instruction and Arts promoted a Royal edict urging educational centres to contribute to the centenary celebrations⁷. Even though it was only intended to promote the centenary celebrations, it inaugurated an increased presence of *Don Quixote* in Spanish educational centres, which was closely related to the publication of several works intended for students. In May, Eduardo Vincenti published his *El ingenioso hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha. El libro de las escuelas. Reducción de la obra inmortal de Cervantes* [*The ingenious gentleman Don Quixote de la Mancha. The book for schools. Digest of Cervantes's immortal work*], which was speedily approved by the Council of Public Instruction for use in schools⁸. Likewise, that same year Saturnino Calleja published his own reduced edition of the novel⁹, for which he wrote an introduction addressed to primary school teachers where he stated that “what we have not dared do –since it would seem to us an extraordinary lack of respect– is modify what Cervantes wrote. That is why we have chosen to completely omit some chapters rather than desecrate the immortal work”¹⁰. A final adaptation of *Don Quixote* for schoolchildren that was published in 1905 is Acisclo Muñiz Vigo's *Catecismo de Cervantes*, which was refashioned *Cervantes en la escuela* in 1912¹¹. In November of the following year, the Ministry for Public Instruction and Arts promoted a Royal edict advocating the use of *Don Quixote* in schools, which was a recommendation rather than a command¹². At the same time, the succession

³ See Storm, 1998.

⁴ Op. cit., p. 626.

⁵ Op. cit., pp. 639-641.

⁶ Op. cit., p. 642.

⁷ See Guereña, 2008.

⁸ See López-Ríos and Herrero, 1995; see also Guereña, 2008, pp. 166-167.

⁹ See López-Ríos and Herrero, 1995, pp. 876-877.

¹⁰ “Lo que no hemos osado, considerándolo como inaudita falta de respeto, es modificar lo escrito por Cervantes. Por eso preferimos suprimir por completo algunos capítulos antes que profanar la obra inmortal”. Quoted in Montero-Reguera, 2001, p. 203. The translation is ours.

¹¹ Op. cit. See also Martín-Rogero, 2007, p. 79.

¹² See Guereña, 2008, p. 171.

of publications concerning the use of the novel in educational centres continued: an important contribution was Antonio Cremades y Bernal, *Comentarios sobre frases de “El Quijote” que tienen relación con la educación e instrucción públicas*. This work contains an argument that will be often repeated in subsequent years: that *Don Quixote* contains much profitable matter for adult readers, but is not appropriate for schoolchildren¹³. 1916 saw the commemoration of the third centenary of Cervantes’s death, which included a celebration carried out by pupils of different schools. *El Imparcial* of 24th April summarized it as follows:

Each of them [the schoolchildren participating in the celebration] carried a bunch of odorous and fragrant flowers, recently picked, to offer them to the genius, to the pride of the fatherland, to he who created that wonderful madman and that portentous boor whose mirthful episodes made them laugh their heads off when they read them in school¹⁴.

If this journalistic extract is interesting, it is because it shows that, as late as 1916, *Don Quixote* was still often seen as a comic novel. According to Storm, amongst the literary intelligentsia there was a clear generation divide. Older authors, such as Valera, Menéndez Pelayo or Picón, saw the novel as essentially a parody; younger ones, such as Navarro Ledesma or Unamuno, viewed it as a serious work and a sad, tragic story¹⁵. In April, Ricardo Monner Sans argued from Buenos Aires against the reading of *Don Quixote* in schools. His argument echoes that of Calleja:

To read it in elementary classes as it came out of the mind of the Algiers prisoner has always struck me as a pedagogical offence; to mutilate it in order to soften some of the roughness of those centuries, or in order to explain concepts so that they are more accessible to infantile intelligences, has always seemed to me a disrespectful desecration¹⁶.

The quagmire described by Monner is always implied in debates about the educational use of *Don Quixote*: to use it as it was written makes it too difficult for schoolchildren, whereas to adapt it involves an alteration of the very essence of a literary work. Addressing an audience of teachers and future teachers in a May 1916 lecture at the School of Higher Teacher Training¹⁷, Francisco Rodríguez Marín dismissed the claim that the novel was obsolete and declared himself in favour of its being read in schools: “that eminent writer Mr. Burell, a most able sculptor of Castilian phrase and an enlightened mind, who fortunately for Spanish culture is Minister of Public Instruction and Arts, can, with just a signature, make *Don Quixote* mandatory reading in schools”¹⁸. In March 1920, a Royal edict promoted by the

¹³ López-Ríos and Herrero, 1995, p. 876.

¹⁴ “Todos llevaban su ramo de flores, olorosas y fragantes, recién cogidas, para ofrenderlas al genio, al orgullo de la patria, al que creó aquel maravilloso loco y aquel zafio portentoso, cuyos regocijadores episodios les hicieron reír a mandíbula batiente al leerlos en la escuela”. Quoted in Guereña, 2008, p. 176. The translation is ours.

¹⁵ Storm, 1998, pp. 652-653; for the opinions of Menéndez Pelayo and Picón, see pp. 639 and 640.

¹⁶ “Leerlo en clases inferiores, como brotó de la mente del cautivo de Argel, se me antojó siempre enormidad pedagógica; mutilarlo para suavizar asperezas propias de aquellos siglos, o aclarar conceptos para que hallen franca entrada en las infantiles inteligencias, me sonó siempre a irreverente profanación”. Quoted in López-Ríos and Herrero, 1995, p. 881. The translation is ours.

¹⁷ See Rodríguez-Marín, 1916.

¹⁸ “Porque el insigne escritor señor Burell, habilísimo cincelador de la frase castellana y privilegiado entendimiento que para bien de la cultura española es ministro de Instrucción pública y Bellas Artes, puede lograr con sólo una

Ministry of Public Instruction and Arts made *Don Quixote* compulsory reading in schools. Interestingly, this edict stated that a summarized edition of the novel for use in school would be published: this edition was never issued, which meant that the edict was never really applied¹⁹. It was, however, hotly debated. The most important contributions to this exchange were José Ortega y Gasset's and Antonio Zozaya's (which Ortega y Gasset took as his starting point), but they were by no means the only ones. For instance, the edict was defended by an anonymous collaborator in the *Boletín escolar*, who took issue with both Ortega y Gasset and Zozaya and also by Manuel Machado in the pages of *La Libertad*²⁰. To the extent that it can be discerned, Antonio Zozaya's position can be called pragmatic: his first argument is that schoolchildren will be bored by their teachers' daily reading of a chapter from *Don Quixote*. He furthermore adds that the novel is not appropriate for children, and that there are many works in the Spanish canon that could be read in schools. Further on, he introduces the true focus of his article: what schoolchildren ought to read in school are newspapers. "Reading one of those", he argues, "chosen by a different student each day (for without this condition the reading would not have the desired effect) would interest the pupils, who would afterwards ask a thousand questions that they would answer for each other, and it would yield as a result a culture that would be superficial, but also general and orientating"²¹. At some points, Zozaya's article depicts a rather naïve model of school:

Fresh air, spontaneity, a young and tolerant teacher, a chunk of bread on one hand and any printed text or newspaper on the other; and then, let children ask whatever they want to, and let teachers answer, if they know how to; and if they do not, let them ask other children so that they tell him. That is a school: everything else is a place of torment²².

This model, of course, relies on the assumption that, left to their own devices, children will display an interest in current affairs and the periodical press. The suggestion that primary schools should be above all a place to read newspapers and ask questions about them horrifies Ortega y Gasset precisely because, from his point of view, current affairs should be the last concern of primary education. Indeed, Ortega y Gasset takes Zozaya's opposition to the reading of *Don Quixote* as his starting point –“ever since the aforementioned Royal edict was proclaimed, I have been waiting for somebody to say this first, so as to hurry to say it second myself”²³– but he is quick to distance himself from the former's arguments:

firma que sea obligatoria la lectura del Quijote en las escuelas”. Op. cit., p. 24. The translation is ours.

¹⁹ See Guereña, 2008, pp. 179-180.

²⁰ López-Ríos and Herrero, 1995, p. 884.

²¹ “Leer uno de estos, elegido cada día por un discípulo (sin tal condición la lectura sería contraproducente), interesaría a los alumnos, que harían luego mil preguntas, que se contestarían los unos a los otros, y darían por resultado una cultura superficial, pero general y orientadora”. Zozaya, 1920, p. 1. The translation is ours.

²² “Aire libre, espontaneidad, un maestro joven y tolerante, un pedazo de pan en una mano y un impreso cualquiera o un periódico en otra; y luego, a preguntar los niños lo que quieran, y los maestros a responder, si saben, y si no, a preguntárselo a los otros chicos para que se lo enseñen. Eso es una escuela; lo demás es un lugar de tormento”. Op. cit. The translation is ours.

²³ “Desde que apareció la Real Orden mencionada esperaba yo que alguien se resolviese a decir esto el primero, con el fin de apresurarme a repetirlo yo el segundo”. Ortega y Gasset, 2017, p. 401. All English translations of Ortega y Gasset's texts are ours.

I am of course horrified by Mr. Zozaya's proposal for newspapers to be read in school. *Hamlet* and *Don Quixote* hinder him because they belong to the seventeenth century and we are now in the twentieth. For my opposite taste, the ideal school would be an institution that might have stayed the same since the wildest times of the past and remain invariable in the most advanced times of the future. For what must be educated in it is immutable in quality and content; it is merely perfectible in intensity²⁴.

Here we can glimpse Ortega y Gasset's position: he is firmly in favour of a school which should have adopted from the outset the sole objective of fostering the students' *natura naturans*, or spontaneous life. In what follows we will detail not only what Ortega y Gasset's ideal school was like, but also how he envisaged achieving that objective: by resorting to myths such as Odysseus or Heracles and discard the reading of *Don Quixote*. However, we will thereafter show why the objective of fostering the students' *natura naturans* would be better served by the reading of selected fragments of *Don Quixote* than by bringing up the myths of Odysseus and Heracles. Let us present Ortega's position first of all.

2. Ortega y Gasset's Argument

In order to understand Ortega y Gasset's attitude towards Zozaya's argument and the debate on the desirability of reading *Don Quixote* in the classroom, it is essential to describe, albeit briefly, the state of his thought in 1920, when he writes *Biología y pedagogía*²⁵, the essay with which we shall concern ourselves²⁶. Due to his years of Neokantian training at the University of Marburg, Ortega y Gasset has a deeply rationalist view of man; but he is quick to realize that rationalism revolves around a fictitious reason insofar as it is not conceived as a vital function. As a consequence, rationalism has a too abstract conception of man as a merely cultural being who is governed by objective laws, with no attention paid to the real individual living in a specific situation. Ortega y Gasset thus shifts his attention to that real, concrete man drawing support from his phenomenological studies. This leads him to conclude that the radical reality that must be taken as a starting point is none other than life itself. In other words, Ortega y Gasset, strongly influenced by his German experience, had first given priority to culture over life. However, with the passing of the years,

²⁴ “[C]laro es que me aterra la proposición hecha por el señor Zozaya de que se lea el periódico en la escuela. Le estorban Hamlet y el Quijote, porque son del siglo XVII y hoy vivimos en el XX. La escuela ideal sería para mi opuesto gusto un instituto que hubiese podido permanecer idéntico desde los tiempos más salvajes del pasado y perdurar invariable en los tiempos más avanzados del futuro. Porque lo que ella ha de educar es inmutable en calidad y contenido; sólo es perfeccionable en intensidad”. Op. cit., p. 406.

²⁵ Op. cit.

²⁶ Due to space limitations, in this article we shall focus on what Ortega y Gasset says about *Don Quixote* in *Biología y Pedagogía*. However, the reader should bear in mind that Ortega y Gasset presents his vision of *Don Quixote* in the greatest detail in *Meditaciones del Quijote*. In this book, Cervantes and *Don Quixote* are presented as an alternative modernity to Cartesian and Kantian idealism: in other words, Cervantes and his immortal work are presented there as a referent of Mediterranean culture that has to be counterpoised to the philosophical culture of Northern Europe in order to achieve an integral European culture. This is what leads Ortega y Gasset to say that *Don Quixote* is a work unsuitable for children, and that it is better to introduce them to it when they are teenagers. More information about Ortega y Gasset's view of *Don Quixote* can be found in de Salas, 2005; Carpintero, 2005; Lasaga, 2005; Martín, 2005; Cerezo, 2007; Zamora, 2014, and San Martín, 2017.

and drawing inspiration from his reflections on Spanish idiosyncrasy –defined in his opinion by its thorough affirmation of life– he comes to conceive living as the radical way of being, while culture appears as a manifestation of life. The basic question that must be clarified at this point is which that radical life to which we must attend is. The answer is already found in *Biología y Pedagogía*: that life is none other than *natura naturans*, the creative, primary and spontaneous life of the spirit, which must therefore be fostered by elemental education²⁷. As to *natura naturata*, mechanical and specialized life, it can be developed later because it, “even culture, is already a decantation of our primeval potencies and appetites; it is, rather than life, a precipitate of vitality, mechanized, anchyrotic life”²⁸.

Starting from this point, Ortega y Gasset takes sides with Zozaya and recommends that *Don Quixote* should not be read in school. However, their respective reasons to advocate the same idea are of course very different: whereas Zozaya sees no place for *Don Quixote* in the classroom because it does not prepare students for practical life, Ortega y Gasset argues that teaching for practical life must come later because, as we have just seen, he believes that what must be fostered in school is *natura naturans*, the spontaneous life which will, much later, support training for a specialized life. An added problem that Ortega y Gasset considers of paramount importance is that “the child’s receptive capacity and the teacher’s educational capacity are very limited in volume, quality and time”²⁹. This limitation means that it is particularly important for school to focus on the development of spontaneous life, as there is not time or capacity to foster practical knowledge. Ortega y Gasset, however, denounces that it has been forgotten that primary, undifferentiated life underlies, and even progresses in its own way, beneath that universally recommended specialization. In this point, Ortega y Gasset takes into account the latest developments of the biology of his day, particularly the contributions of his friend Gregorio Marañón. Against Darwinian determinism, according to which every organism must adapt to the environment where it lives –so that emphasis is placed on the external functions that act directly upon the environment–, the new biology emphasizes the key role played by internal functions which were traditionally ignored but which are essential for the organism’s integral performance. Suffice to mention that the role of hormones had been unknown until this time, when it was found that nothing in an organism can work without them. This leads Ortega y Gasset to conclude that “unorganized life creates organization, and the progress, the continuance, the constant impetus of the latter are always the work of the former”. For instance, the Greek sixth century B.C., the thirteenth century and the renaissance are great creative eras preceded by an explosion of savagery³⁰. However, unlike Rousseau, Ortega y Gasset does not advocate a return to primitive existence renouncing culture and civilization, since he considers that “the value of primitive life lies in its being the inexhaustible source of cultural and civil organization”, so that primitive life is not by itself the ideal form of organization³¹.

²⁷ Op. cit., p. 406.

²⁸ “[I]ncluso la cultura, es ya decantación de nuestras potencias y apetitos primigenios, es más bien que vida, precipitado de vitalidad, vida mecanizada, anquilosada”. Op. cit., p. 406.

²⁹ “[L]a capacidad receptiva del niño y la docente del maestro son muy limitadas en volumen, en calidad y en tiempo”. Op. cit., p. 402.

³⁰ “La vida no organizada crea la organización, y todo progreso de ésta, su mantenimiento, su impulsión constante, son siempre obra de aquélla”. Op. cit., p. 408.

³¹ “El valor de la vida primitiva es ser fontana inagotable de la organización cultural y civil”. Op. cit., p. 408.

In the psychic realm, too, there are external functions such as perception, which allows us to apprehend our environment; but there are also internal functions that are much more important. The difference between wanting and desiring is a clear example: while Ortega y Gasset conceives wanting as the will to make something possible, or the will for something possible to happen, desiring implies the realization that whatever is desired is relatively or absolutely impossible. As children learn to distinguish the possible from the impossible, their will gradually retires from many objects that become classed as unreachable. However, “desiring nourishes wanting, it excites wanting, it constantly hovers over wanting, making it expand, making it try time and again for what yesterday was impossible”³². It may therefore be assumed that a utilitarian pedagogy will attempt to set aside desires and focus only on those appetites that can be satisfied. Ortega y Gasset, on the contrary, advises fostering desires in order to preserve the impetus to attempt many things which seem impossible or unfeasible. Regarding this point, there are individuals whose vital pulse has an ascending tonality and is characterized by the overflowing abundance of its vitality, whilst individuals with a descending tonality display a constitutive mistrust of themselves which spreads and paralyzes. Historical eras are determined by the preponderance of individuals of one type or the other: that is why education should never strive to adapt the child to the environment, but quite the opposite; absolute priority should be given to the primary vital tone of his or her personality.

On the other hand, feeling constitutes an internal psychic function that does not seem to have an external usefulness, but there are feelings –specifically, “happiness, sadness, hopefulness, melancholy, compassion, shame, ambition, rancour, sympathy and countless others”– which allow the vital pulse to feed and regulate itself³³. The vital pulse can therefore be controlled depending on the feelings that are brought out, which is why Ortega y Gasset advocates that children should be surrounded by “daring and magnanimous, ambitious and enthusiastic feelings”, keeping them away from anything that might depress their self-confidence³⁴. In order to bring out those feelings, Ortega y Gasset adds, we cannot use facts or the exact ideas of things, but myths, fantastic images that have no direct employment in life, but which excite the vital pulse. The myths recommended by Ortega y Gasset are Odysseus and Heracles, primitive images that have always excited the imagination of the readers. In contrast, Ortega y Gasset opposes reading *Don Quixote* in school because it is too modern a book, whereas the atmosphere of children’s classrooms “must be perennially old, primitive, always amongst the lights and the murmurs of the dawn”³⁵. Unfortunately, Ortega y Gasset does not provide more details about the undesirability of reading *Don Quixote* in school, which is the topic to which we now turn.

³² “El deseo nutre el querer, lo excita, gravita constantemente sobre él, moviéndolo a ampliarse, a ensayar una vez y otra la realización de lo que ayer era imposible”. Op. cit., p. 414.

³³ “La alegría, la tristeza, la esperanza, la melancolía, la compasión, la vergüenza, la ambición, el rencor, la simpatía y otras innumerables”. Op. cit., p. 419.

³⁴ “[S]entimientos audaces y magnánimos, ambiciosos y entusiastas”. Op. cit., p. 420.

³⁵ “[D]ebe mantenerse perennemente antiguo, primitivo, siempre entre luces y ruidos de aurora”. Op. cit., p. 421.

3. Reply to Ortega y Gasset: Why Odysseus and Heracles rather than Don Quixote?

Even though Ortega y Gasset argued that he did not have –or, rather, that he dared not have– pedagogical ideas³⁶, our previous section proves that he did suggest interesting pedagogical ideas despite their brevity and their essentially philosophical character. In this article we do not intend to challenge his proposal. Indeed, we believe that its interest is reflected in the fact that it can be perfectly extrapolated to today's educational context. From our point of view, it would be extremely interesting for current education to give more weight to *natura naturans*, i.e., to the development of the pupils' primitive, spontaneous life. And we, too, believe that myths are much more appropriate than facts to summon those feelings that must fill the sails of the students' psychic life. Our discrepancy with Ortega y Gasset is minimal, since we will only take issue with the expediency of the myths chosen by Ortega y Gasset. In order to do this, we will start from his own pedagogical proposal so as to decide whether a myth is appropriate or not. More specifically, we aim to show that Odysseus and Heracles share some basic features that do not make them particularly suitable for use in the classroom, whereas Don Quixote –who admittedly can only be called a myth in the broadest sense of the word– possesses a number of traits that make him especially apt to be presented to students as a myth that nourishes and excites their vital pulse.

Before we start, we should like to highlight a problem that is common to the myths of Odysseus, Heracles and Don Quixote. In principle, these three myths can excite the imagination of many boys in sundry ways; but it is not quite as clear that girls can identify with them. They are, after all, three male characters with peculiar relationships to women. Thus Odysseus took part in actions where women were kidnapped and was remarkably promiscuous³⁷; meanwhile, his wife, Penelope, patiently awaited his return at home, keeping her suitors at bay and thinking of him as an ideal husband. As to Heracles, one of his most distinctive traits is his extraordinary promiscuity –which was presented as indicative of his virility–, so that most of his wives had hardly any other role in his life than as gifts received as a reward for different exploits. Concerning Don Quixote, it is well known that Aldonza Lorenzo, the only real female character of importance in Cervantes's immortal work, is presented, in part I, chapter XXV, as a vulgar peasant of Moorish ancestry, known for her roughness and lewdness and who most importantly does not even appear in the narrative as a proper character: for her role is merely to serve as a counterpoint to and inspiration for the peerless Dulcinea del Toboso, the idealized lady to whom Don Quixote, as any knight-errant must, dedicated his exploits. Although it is true that at least *Don Quixote* can be read –at least from a certain angle– as an extraordinary love story, it is a story whose female protagonist splits into, on the one hand, a derided and absent woman and, on the other, a non-existent lady. For these reasons it is unlikely that girls will identify or feel emotionally involved with the female characters of this work. Even if they did, we should ask ourselves to which extent that identification is healthy or recommendable.

³⁶ Op. cit., p. 401.

³⁷ Perpinyà has presented Odysseus as the first sexual tourist, someone who satisfies his erotic desires in exotic lands. See Perpinyà, 2008.

Having said this, we may now focus on an assessment of Odysseus and Heracles as myths which can have the effect that Ortega y Gasset desires. The main reason why Ortega y Gasset chose both myths is the fact that they show that effort can conquer everything despite the opposition of gods and mortals: as a matter of fact, Ortega y Gasset adds that “some violence and toughness should also be fostered” in the child³⁸. Identification with such virile heroes, particularly if a violent fighting is taken as reference, would supposedly allow children to feel as though they were invincible beings after having overcome terrible beasts or villains. However, the alleged exploits of Odysseus and, more so, those of Heracles are traversed with murders, to such an extent that this seems the way in which they usually cope with their environment. Even though Odysseus is defined by his cunning, as proved by the episode in which –following Circe’s advice– he avoids his and his crew’s falling prey to the sirens, we believe that Ortega y Gasset does not seem to have those episodes in mind, but rather those where the hero acts in an energetic and violent manner. In point of fact, in the renowned sirens episode Odysseus remains bound to the mast of his ship although he entreats the sailors to release him so that he can join the sirens who have bewitched him with their singing. In this case, therefore, Odysseus plays a passive role and appears as a kind of restrained victim, which does not seem compatible with the enthusiasm and the “self-confidence” that, according to Ortega y Gasset, must flow forth from the myth of Odysseus³⁹. Bearing this in mind, if what we seek are episodes that display the irresistible vitality of myths when faced with any obstacle that gets in their way, we will have to focus on rash acts; and those, in the case of Odysseus and Heracles, usually lead to manslaughter⁴⁰. Following a similar line, Laín Entralgo warned that the healthy individual’s surrender to the world with no utilitarian goals must go beyond the merely sporting and festive character of Ortega y Gasset’s proposal. Instead, the life and education of the national-syndicalist child, adds Laín Entralgo, must take on a military character because, unlike utilitarianism, this would not limit his vital environment; on the contrary, this environment would broaden because the hunter and the conqueror perceive more aspects of their immediate surroundings. In order to foster mentalities in line with the motto *Vita milita est*, Laín Entralgo suggests increasing the child’s vital impulses and resources by means of prose narratives, *romances*⁴¹ and coloured prints based on national-syndicalist beliefs in the Spanish Fatherland, the Empire and God. Laín Entralgo particularly advised the use of stories and images that extolled the Civil War then devastating Spain⁴². But this advice does nothing to solve the problem posed, in our opinion, by the attempt to foster the students’ vital pulse by having them gloat upon violent acts.

Let us now see the advantages of Don Quixote to generate the feelings that Ortega y Gasset wanted to foster in children. We may say of Odysseus and Heracles that they are heroes from their birth who can overcome any rival: Heracles, for instance, while still a baby in his cradle, killed the two snakes sent by Hera to strangle him, so he was a practically invincible hero from the moment of his birth. Don Quixote,

³⁸ “Un poco de violencia y un poco de dureza convendría también fomentar”. Ortega y Gasset, 2017, p. 420.

³⁹ “[C]onfianza en sí mismo”. Op. cit., p. 420.

⁴⁰ Of course, we assume that the most tragic episodes should not be mentioned: for instance, the frenzy which led Heracles to murder his wife, Megara, his three sons and his two nephews.

⁴¹ Laín Entralgo refers to *romance*, a Spanish poetic form comprising mainly ballads –also called *romances*– of popular origin, many of which date from the Middle Ages. See Laín Entralgo, 1937.

⁴² Op. cit.

in contrast, is far from a hero: he can, in fact, be considered the utmost example of an antihero bent on becoming a hero. In order to do this, he must create himself; or rather, he must create a character that is very different from what he is in the beginning. Thus he is compelled to give himself a name and a cognomen, as well as to find arms, armour, a horse, a squire and a lady to whom he can dedicate his victories. Furthermore, he must go forth in search of the adventures that will make a hero of him; for, while adventures seem to come to Odysseus and Heracles, so that their lives are a succession of enormous challenges, Don Quixote must create his own adventures because his life is completely devoid of them. He usually gets the worst of those adventures, which often result in beatings or mockery; this seems to make Don Quixote a most inappropriate character to generate those feelings of irrepressible vitality that Ortega y Gasset suggested should be fostered in children. However, as we will see in due course, this does not make Don Quixote an inappropriate character to reach Ortega y Gasset's aims.

We will shortly explain how Don Quixote can serve to generate daring, magnanimous, ambitious and enthusiastic feelings in students, but previously we want to highlight that he can be used for other important goals. Indeed, a few years after his essay, Ortega y Gasset will become convinced that life must not prevail over culture but that a balance between the two must be achieved because vital spontaneity must flourish within institutions lest chaotic situations are reached. Taking this into account, such a complex and nuanced character as Don Quixote can also be useful to teach students such important aspects as the limitations of our will; this is an aspect which Ortega y Gasset had already addressed by means of his distinction between wanting and desiring.

In our opinion, should myths be used to educate children in the belief that they can get anything they want if they exert themselves enough, in the beginning their self-confidence could be strengthened; but soon they would realize that their expectations are frequently frustrated despite their most conscientious efforts. There are many passages in *Don Quixote* that show that one may not get everything that one wants and that not everything is possible: a message that is certainly important to instil in children unless we want them to lead them to the blindest primitivism⁴³.

Another extraordinarily valuable lesson that can be taken from Don Quixote is that, although he gets the worst of his encounters with rivals, his is actually an inward struggle. From this point of view, Don Quixote displays an admirable capacity for resilience that leads him time and again to recover –not without arduous efforts– from the severe defeats and mishaps that he suffers. This inward struggle is no less intense than the physical combats that made Odysseus and Heracles famous. We must not forget that students will very often have to face serious internal conflicts, whereas they are unlikely to have to fight to the death with beasts and legendary warriors.

As we have already said, Don Quixote can be considered the antihero par excellence, which would not encourage children to identify with him, since they are more likely to pay attention to heroes or triumphant characters of any kind. However, if we address the strength with which Don Quixote faces his internal conflicts, such identification may be encouraged. This, in turn, may allow students to perceive the phenomenon of bullying from a new perspective: whereas social pressure usually

⁴³ See Ariso, 2015.

leads individuals to identify with successful characters and avoid identification with those who are perceived as deranged or losers, an appropriate presentation of the figure of Don Quixote will allow students, perhaps for the first time, to understand and regard the strengths of a character who appears to be a weakling and the object of all kinds of jokes. To this we may add that identification with a character is easier and more realistic when the model is not a paragon of perfection but someone who displays hesitations and weaknesses. In this connection, Manuel Machado recommended reading *Don Quixote* in schools because it could sow in students the seed of taste and provide them with an unequalled cultural foundation, but he warned that the teacher should not explain the novel in depth so as not to imbue children with the unfathomable sadness that the book gives off⁴⁴. Of course we agree that *Don Quixote*, particularly in its second part, frequently sinks into immeasurable depths; therefore we think that other fragments are more appropriate to be presented or read in the classroom. But we should like to add that children lack the necessary vital experience to detect –let alone sink into– the deep abysses into which Don Quixote gradually descends; so much so, that describing those abysses, particularly to those who cannot descend into them by themselves, would be one of the most complex tasks of a teacher presenting this novel in the classroom⁴⁵.

We must now explain why Don Quixote may be presented as a particularly suitable myth to generate those feelings that Ortega y Gasset wanted to foster in students. As is well known, Don Quixote wavers between moments of deep dejection and displays of extreme, nearly pathological self-confidence. Indeed, many of his speeches and adventures could be invoked as nearly unsurpassable examples to transmit daring, magnanimous, ambitious and enthusiastic feelings. For instance, if Ortega y Gasset does not want children to sense “the uncertain nature of existence”⁴⁶, no example could seem less fitting than the windmills episode in part I, chapter VIII. From the way in which Cervantes describes the scene, it is obvious enough –as Sancho Panza, the squire, is quick to point out– that what Don Quixote takes to be enormous giants are actually nothing but windmills, that being the reason why he ends up badly thrashed after rushing against one of them. However, although many people believe that the adventure closes with a badly injured Don Quixote returning home in realization of his error, this is actually not true⁴⁷. As a matter of fact, as soon as Sancho runs at his side to assist him, Don Quixote explains that his predicament was due to a spell cast by the sage Frison, and he adds that the latter’s wicked arts will not prevail against the will of his sword. Furthermore, far from returning home in disheartenment, thinking of leaving his mission as a knight-errant, he heads directly to Puerto Lápice in search of more adventures. Faced with this famous episode, there will be those who think that it comes down to a poor man tilting at windmills. However, even though Don Quixote immediately realizes that he has crashed against a windmill, he does at no point perceive the uncertain nature of existence, because his faith and his impetus only allow him to see giants and spells. Sancho is the plain man lacking in faith; Don Quixote is the hero who, before charging, asks Sancho to step aside and pray if he is afraid. Sancho’s outlook is available to anyone, but

⁴⁴ Machado, 1920.

⁴⁵ Naturally, we do not mean by this that teachers must even attempt to lead students into those depths.

⁴⁶ “[L]o equivoco de la existencia”. Ortega y Gasset, 2017, p. 420.

⁴⁷ At this point it is necessary to recall that, as Sciascia (1984) points out, *Don Quixote* is not widely read because many people presume they know what it is about although they have not read it.

Don Quixote's is only within the reach of those who understand that, as he says, the fortunes of war are more liable to fluctuations than any other. Sancho lives in the peace of empirical existence, whilst Don Quixote dwells in the war of faith, in desiring in a grade of passionate blindness to the uncertain nature of existence that is unattainable to Odysseus or Heracles.

Since it is desirable that children start learning how to distinguish between errors and anomalies from an early age⁴⁸, we may expect them to assert that the windmills episode is not the product of a mere error, but a complete anomaly. However, this rationalist reading is not typical of whoever, as Díez Alonso points out, reads *Don Quixote* like an adventure-loving child who is impervious to any kind of complexity or hidden message and who, for this reason, upon closing the book, feels as though he were its protagonist and rides with its hero⁴⁹. An invitation to read in this manner does not imply indoctrinating the child by blinding him to a number of alternatives and possibilities which are obvious to the rest of his peers⁵⁰. On the contrary, this type of reading allows him, even if only fleetingly, to view the world from a different perspective. This, however, is not the perspective of an insane person or one that should be immediately discarded for a reason that is supposedly obvious but, at the same time, quite difficult to specify. That reason which it is not easy to identify is that Don Quixote's perspective constitutes a constant process of creation that is exceedingly difficult to bear. We believe that this is an extreme example of that creative life in which, according to Ortega y Gasset's advice, students should be raised: the life of wild and primitive man which leads to the creation of culture and civilization⁵¹. In order to illustrate this creative life we will introduce the episode of Dulcinea's portrait in part I, chapter IV.

In this episode, Don Quixote meets a group of traders whom he suddenly compels to acknowledge that there is no woman in the world more beautiful than Dulcinea. Since they do not know her, and having realized that Don Quixote is not to be taken seriously, the traders ask him to at least show them a portrait of her so that their confession is truly creditable. But Don Quixote is incensed and answers: "If I were to show her to you, what merit would you have in confessing a truth so manifest? The essential point is that without seeing her you must believe, confess, affirm, swear, and defend it"⁵². Ariso had already used this example to illustrate the creative aspect of Unamuno's conception of faith as something that must be constantly fed by uncertainty, that is, by the conflict between reason and a desire so intense that it "contributes to give form to the object of faith"⁵³. Although it was not Ortega y Gasset's intention to redeem his readers and he did not share Unamuno's conception of faith, we think that he would fully agree with the need for the children's desire or fantasy to build those objects that must excite their vital pulse until they become subjects who are vitally perfect or, at least, suffused with vitality.

⁴⁸ See Ariso, 2019a.

⁴⁹ Díez-Alonso, 2005.

⁵⁰ As a matter of fact, education and the very process of socialization of any child necessarily demand that he be encouraged –in case he does not already do so spontaneously– to ignore multiple alternative possibilities to those that he is gradually assimilating as absolutely true. See Ariso, 2019b.

⁵¹ See Ortega y Gasset, 2017, pp. 406-408.

⁵² Cervantes, 5-12-2021. This argument for the precedence of faith over sensible evidence is a clear allusion to John 20: "because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed". John 20:29. Holy Bible, King James Version, 5-12-2021.

⁵³ Ariso, 2017, p. 101. See Unamuno, 1987.

4. Conclusion

Our concern in writing this article was not only presenting an interesting episode in the history of education in Spain or discussing the convenience of reading such an immortal work as *Don Quixote* in the classroom. We also wanted to emphasize the validity that Ortega y Gasset's pedagogical ideas can still have in our days. It is true that during the last few decades emotional intelligence has become a recurring object of study and that its presence in classrooms has notably increased. As a consequence, special attention has been paid in the educational domain to the identification and expression of all kinds of emotions and feelings. Nevertheless, we must also acknowledge that emotional education has mainly addressed the development of competences that allow daily life problems to be solved, since its basic aim is to solve academic needs which are not tended to in ordinary academic subjects⁵⁴. Of course, the development of the students' vital pulse to the extent desired by Ortega y Gasset does not feature amongst those academic needs. This should not come as a surprise because emotional education emphasizes the students' adaptation to their environment, whereas Ortega y Gasset pleads for the environment to adapt to the child until she eventually appropriates it. This is why the child appears as a heroic creator of legends that lead her to see in her surroundings only that which can conform to those legends and to remain blind to everything else⁵⁵. Of course, the goal here is not a utilitarian education that is attached to reality. Rather, the aim is for children's fantasy to take wing up to the point where each child creates her own landscape from objects that captivate her. This is the main reason why we have written this article: to show the value that *Don Quixote* may have for precisely the type of education from which Ortega y Gasset excluded it. However, we also recommend reading *Don Quixote* in the classroom so that students do not miss the chance to approach this literary jewel with an open mind, in order to stop them from viewing it from a distance –that is, without reading it– for the rest of their lives, as the insipid and absurd tale of an insane old man who tilted, astride his horse, against windmills.

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⁵⁴ See Bisquerra, 2001.

⁵⁵ See Ortega y Gasset, 2017, p. 430.

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