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Title: A Postmodern Offspring of *Don Juan Tenorio: Abre los ojos*

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Abstract: Although many scholars have considered Calderón de la Barca's masterpiece *La vida es sueño* as the literary precursor to the film *Abre los ojos*, directed by Alejandro Amenábar (1997), the film has much more in common with José Zorrilla's classic from Spain's Romantic period: *Don Juan Tenorio*. The protagonists, Don Juan in Zorrilla's work, and César in the film, share the well-known characteristics of the famous Spanish rogue; nevertheless they fall victim to the same mortal sin of pride. Both fail to cultivate meaningful relationships with the important people in their lives, lack a father figure, fall in love unexpectedly, express contrition regarding their past, and are granted a dubious salvation in the end. Furthermore, parallels exist in the global structure of these two works in that they are divided into two parts, a "real" world and one that takes place on a chimeric plane, which obstructs the distinction between reality and dream. Throughout the centuries, writers, dramatists and filmmakers have adopted the figure of Don Juan to express their literary purposes, and César is exactly the postmodern version of this iconic character at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

Keywords: Don Juan, *Abre los ojos*, postmodern, Hell, virtual reality, guilt

Resumen: Aunque muchos críticos han considerado *La vida es sueño*, obra maestra de Calderón de la Barca, como precursora literaria de la película *Abre los ojos*, dirigida por Alejandro Amenábar (1997), la película tiene mucho más en común con una obra clásica del período romántico español: *Don Juan Tenorio*. Los protagonistas, Don Juan, en la obra de Zorrilla, y César, en la película de Amenábar, comparten características típicamente 'donjuanescas;" sin embargo a ambos les pierde el mismo pecado mortal: la soberbia, ninguno de los dos cuida las relaciones que mantienen con las personas importantes en sus vidas, carecen de una figura paternal, se enamoran cuando no se lo esperaban, expresan contrición sobre su pasado y encuentran una salvación dudosa al final. También existen paralelos en la estructura global de ambas obras que pueden dividirse en dos partes, una que es el mundo "real" y la otra que tiene lugar en un nivel quimérico, lo cual dificulta la distinción entre realidad y sueño. A lo largo de los siglos escritores, dramaturgos y cineastas han adoptado la figura de Don Juan para expresar sus propósitos literarios, y César es precisamente la versión postmoderna de este personaje icónico en los albores del siglo veintiuno.

Palabras clave: Don Juan, *Abre los ojos*, postmoderno, infierno, realidad virtual, culpa
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A Postmodern Offspring of *Don Juan Tenorio: Abre los ojos*

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Several works of literature have been suggested as literary precursors to Spanish filmaker Alejandro Amenábar's remarkable *Abre los ojos* (1997). Amenábar's "preoccupation with the confounding of dreams and reality [...] underscores a distinctly Spanish sensibility with antecedents in literature and drama dating back centuries" (Knollmeyer 205). Critics have detected intertextual resonances of "Las ruinas circulares" and "El Zahir" by Jorge Luis Borges, "La noche boca arriba" by Julio Cortázar, *Pedro Páramo* by Juan Rulfo, and even the *Quijote* itself. The antecedent most frequently cited is Calderón de la Barca's *La vida es sueño*.[1] Certainly, such a comparison is fitting since Amenábar's protagonist, César, unknowingly lives a dream during a great portion of the film. However, when one considers the essential aspects of the film, such as, first, the development of the principal character, a successful but ultimately heartless, self-centered lothario, thoughtless towards the others in his life, and second, its narrative structure that frames the protagonist's fall into hell caused by his own inherent character flaws, and his fortunate and perhaps unmerited redemption, it is clear that *Abre los ojos* is most indebted to another classic of Spanish theatre: *Don Juan Tenorio* (1844).

In the almost four centuries since the first appearance of Don Juan in *El burlador de Sevilla,* authors and filmmakers have adapted the Don Juan story to reflect their personal interpretations in accordance with the times in which they lived. It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss the dozens of literary, theatrical and cinematographic incarnations of Don Juan, through which each author returns to this archetypal figure as a means of expressing his or her own personal "phantoms" (Pérez-Bustamante 1998). Nevertheless, despite all the reworkings and parodies that the character has undergone since its inception, Sarah Wright observes that even into the twenty-first century

> [...] it is still possible to talk about 'the Don Juan figure,' a character drawn in part from a myriad of literary variations on a theme, and in part from the potency of our attraction to the womanizing (anti-)hero. (13)[2]

As each new literary epoch comes and goes, Don Juan endures and adapts to changes in tastes and styles with his renowned roguery intact.

For his part, Aménabar utilizes this very familiar text to express his own postmodern concerns, a vision of urban alienation, of a groundless generation indifferent to the stabilizing force of true love, friendship, and religious faith, for whom narcissism and self-image have been mystified to the point where they are sacrosanct and have become the precepts of all interpersonal relationships. Amenábar has created a world where "vitality has been replaced by virtuality, life by life extension" (Smith 96). The film's protagonist, César, invents a virtual dream life, a "paradise" promised to be delivered to him by means of some future technology only barely imagined today; however, it is a means of existence that is by nature detached and chimerical. To his horror this groundlessness causes César's postmodern world to collapse due to his failure to be (or to the metaphysical impossibility of being) both subject and object, to be both creator and created. What César fails to recognize is that there will always be

external forces impelling, limiting, and governing the course of one's existence. For Don Juan, it is the will of God that condemns his rebelliousness and then ultimately saves him. For César, paradoxically, this external force is internal: the unconquerable guilt brought on by memories of past sins, from which, despite his attempts, his dream world cannot protect him. This guilt is manifested with progressive frequency as the image of the disfigured monster he sees when he looks in the mirror as part of the Don Juan dream life that, in a further paradox, César both embraces and rejects.

In the end, as Amenábar's film illustrates, the past will always be a determining factor of the present. Indeed, he suggests, no matter how much time passes or how much dehumanizing technology intervenes in the formation, or in this case the manufacturing, of one's existence, humans cannot divest themselves of their basic condition. Despite the postmodernistic erosion of the "real," in reality the soul cries out for something tangible, loving. César desperately tries to recreate by means of human technology the face that he was born with, that God had given him, if you will. Related to this and as a further point of convergence between the film and the play, is a subtext revolving around belief in God. Although much more subtly expressed in *Abre los ojos*, Christianity is nonetheless present. César, like Don Juan, denies the existence of God, placing instead his hope for a post-death "salvation" in the hands of technology, a lack of faith that ultimately contributes to his personal "hell."

In the opening act of *Don Juan Tenorio* as Don Juan and his "friend" and rival, Don Luis, settle a bet made one year before as to who has done more damage in the elapsed time, he boasts of having killed thirty-two men and conquered seventy-two women over that time, outdoing his rival on both counts. Furthermore, doubling the bet, he boasts he can seduce two more women before the night is over: Doña Ana, the fiancée of Don Luis, and Doña Inés, who is about to profess her vows as a novice and who had been promised to him by her father, the powerful Comendador Don Gonzalo de Ulloa, only to have that promise rescinded in the wake of the bet becoming public knowledge. Don Juan achieves the first part and is on the verge of achieving the second when he is interrupted by the irate fiancé and father of the young ladies. Claiming (more or less sincerely) to be a changed man due to the love of the beautiful and innocent Doña Inés, Don Juan throws himself at the feet of the Comendador. Unfortunately, he is a victim of his own reputation. The Comendador, believing it to be a trick to escape his wrath, is unmoved. Cornered, then, Don Juan cold bloodedly murders Don Gonzalo with a pistol shot, kills Don Luis in a sword-fight, and subsequently flees to Italy.

The second part of the play takes place five years later. Don Juan returns to Seville and finds that his father has turned the family palace into a pantheon to honor the victims of his diabolical son, one being Doña Inés, who has succumbed to a broken heart. When Don Juan sees the statue over her tomb he is moved to tears. He then defiantly invites the statue of Don Gonzalo to dine with him and his guests that evening. When the statue, a ghostly messenger from beyond the grave, arrives and informs Don Juan that he has only one more day to live, Don Juan believes it is a joke played on him by his guests and challenges them to a duel. In the final act, back at the pantheon, the statue prepares to take Don Juan to Hell, informing him that he had lost the duel and his moments on earth are numbered. Miraculously, he is saved by the spirit of Doña Inés, who had offered her soul to God in exchange for that of Don Juan and who had remained in Purgatory awaiting him. After Don Juan's act of contrition in his final breath both souls ascend to heaven.

The plot of *Abre los ojos* does not follow a straight chronological narrative line. Much of it is told through a series of flashbacks and a weaving of scenes that serves to blur the barrier between dream and reality. The handsome young playboy César goes for

a game of racquetball with his friend Pelayo, who is shocked to learn that the unheard of has occurred, that César has "repeated" with a woman, who turns out to be the beautiful but emotionally unstable Nuria, femme fatal of the film. Later, at César's 25th birthday party, Pelayo introduces him to Sofía, the "love of his life." César turns on his trademark charm and within a short time Sofía is taken with him. Devastated, Pelayo sees the writing on the wall and bitterly leaves Sofía "in good hands." After spending a platonic night in Sofía's apartment César is confronted by Nuria, who has been stalking him. In what turns out to be a fatal move César gets in the car with her, who plunges them off a cliff in an attempted murder-suicide. She dies, and the accident leaves César's face horribly and irreparably disfigured. Later, in what seems like a miracle, new surgical techniques emerge, and his beautiful face is restored. Sofía is now his lover, and Pelayo is his best friend again.

Soon, however, this sublime existence is shattered as César little by little loses contact with reality. He winds up in prison accused of having murdered Sofía, whose figure morphs back and forth into that of Nuria, in a crime he does not remember committing. At the resolution of the film César (and the audience) discovers that the entire idyllic/horrific post-surgery life had been only a dream. Unable to live looking like a monster, César had contracted the services of Life Extension, a company that specializes in cryogenic freezing, killed himself, and gone into a deep freeze. He was awakened in the year 2145, but instead of living in the future world, he had signed the still-undeveloped Clause 14, the option of living his ideal life of 1997 in a dream with no recollection of having died. Due to some technical glitch, however, the dream turns into a nightmare in which César, unaware that he is dead and dreaming, tries to make sense of a reality that is progressively more senseless, consequently sinking deeper into confusion and despair. Finally salvation arrives in the (virtual) person of Mr. Duvernois, the 1997 spokesman for Life Extension. César chooses to wake up in the year 2145, have his face repaired with the surgical advancements available in that year, and resume his "natural" life.

Yet the parallel between *Abre los ojos* and *Don Juan Tenorio* is extensive and goes much deeper than the surface intertext. Certainly, for César, life is a dream, and for that, comparisons have been made between him and Segismundo, the protagonist of *La vida es sueño*, except that, whereas, Segismundo lived in a reality that he came to think was a dream, César lives in a dream that he thinks is reality. Throughout his dream life, César never grasps the fact that the inexplicable events he must suffer stem from fears and insecurities seething in the depths of his mind (Perri 93). To complicate matters, every aspect of César's dream world, generated by his own subconscious, is unexpectedly filtered by his conscience, a phenomenon the technology of Life Extension failed to take into account. The unexpected return of his disfigurement in his dream life, therefore, is an outward manifestation of the ugliness inside of him, brought to the surface by a feeling of guilt buried deep in his subconscious that has not diminished in a hundred and fifty years. From this stream of sub-consciousness flows the anguish he caused Pelayo for having stolen Sofía from him. What is more significant, César's face returns permanently to its disfigured form as he is fleeing Sofía's apartment after he murders Sofía/Nuria, a crime that is symbolic of his Don Juan-ish lack of consideration towards women. When he looks into the mirror and sees a "monstruo," it is the "monstruo de la liviandad" that Don Diego sees in his son Don Juan.

After taking a close look at César and the circumstances surrounding his "dream," one may detect closer parallels with *Don Juan Tenorio* than with the Calderonian masterpiece. To start with the most obvious, César is a "Don Juan." He and Zorrilla's hero both have a similar arsenal of weapons at their disposal for their sexual conquests, prominently, physical appeal, personal charm or eloquence, and wealth.

The impressionable Doña Inés can not resist succumbing to the golden words of the letter written in the form of a poem that Don Juan has composed for her. In the scene of their mutual declaration of love she tries to come to grips with her attraction towards him due primarily to his "vista fascinadora" and his "palabra seductora," which she frets as having come from the Great Seducer Satan himself. Don Juan, in addition, readily buys the complicity of Brígida and Lucía, trusted servants of Doña Inés and Doña Ana, to help facilitate their conquests.

César is the orphaned son of a rich family, his father having owned a chain of restaurants. Neither César nor Don Juan has to work to earn a living; therefore, they can dedicate all their time in the pursuit of pleasure. César's handsomeness—his alluring face, his stylish hair, and fine physique—is given due consideration by the camera throughout most of the film and forms a stark counterpoint to the hideousness of his face after the accident. In the opening sequence, for example, Amenábar progressively reveals César's body to the audience, beginning as César sits up in bed, silhouetted by the backlighting from the street outside the window. He then cuts to a close-up of the reflection of a dreary César in the bathroom mirror, then to him in the shower, the shower door creating a scrim-like filter between the audience's gaze and César's nude body. Finally he cuts back to another close-up in the bathroom mirror, César's wet locks dangling across his forehead before he glides them behind his ears with both hands highlighting the extraordinary features of his face. His looks, "combined with his inherited wealth, has made his life—particularly his sexual life—effortless" (Laraway 69). At the party he persuades Sofía to let him accompany her home. There, he proposes that they draw pictures of each other expressing their impressions of the other. Whereas Don Juan used the power of poetry to seduce Doña Inés, César, in more cinematographic fashion, wins Sofía by drawing a beautiful portrait of her. Both of these "texts" turn out to be important actants in their respective stories. The first, when found by the *Comendador*, is proof that Don Juan has visited his daughter in the convent. The second, whose image has changed from that of Sofía to that of Nuria, is a key, horrifying indication to the viewer and to César himself that either he is losing his mind or the life he is living is not real.

The primary element that leads to both Don Juan's and César's horrifying fall is the unbridled sense of freedom from responsibility exacerbated to a fatal extent by their emotional disconnection from friends, lovers, and family that would serve to temper their roguish conduct. Neither protagonist seems capable or willing to maintain meaningful relationships with people of either sex. Women for both are throwaway objects. César (with one fatal exception) makes it a point never to be (or be seen) with the same woman twice. And, if we are to believe Don Juan's own famous account of his recent bad behavior, even if he had wanted to "repeat" with a woman, he simply did not have the time. Dividing his seventy-two conquests into 365 days' time, he dedicated, "uno para enamorarlas, / otro para conseguirlas, / otro para abandonarlas, / dos para sustituirlas / y un hora para olvidarlas" (686-690), prompting Ermanno Caldera to observe, "Cinco días y una hora: que, multiplicado por 72, da como resultado 363, cubriendo así todo el año, más dos días... ¡de descanso!" (19).[3] Furthermore, neither values very highly the friendship of another male. Although Don Juan refers to Doña Ana as "la dama de algún amigo" (674), his competitive desire to expand his macho reputation as the paramount winner supersedes any idea of true friendship. He is acutely aware that if he succeeds in conquering Doña Ana, due to the mores of the time she will be "damaged goods" to Don Luis, who would then not be able to marry her, thereby converting a would-be friend into a bitter enemy. For his part, César is only slightly less unconcerned about the feelings of Pelayo because he blandly proposes to Sofía that he simply

won't tell Pelayo if she sleeps with him. Their mutual "best friendship" does not stop César from stabbing him in the back by stealing the girl of his dreams without the slightest hesitation or feeling of guilt.

Somewhere along the line, however, both Don Juans fall in love. Doña Inés and Sofía finally penetrate the armor surrounding the hearts of the two libertines. In Zorrilla's drama the feeling is definitely mutual. At first, Doña Inés is simply a play in the macho game between Don Juan and Don Luis. In a daring defiance of both heavenly and earthly authority he announces to all his intention of possessing Doña Inés, although the previous marriage agreement between the families is furthest from his mind. Don Gonzalo, overhearing, responds to his brazen boast: "[...]no penséis en doña Inés. / Porque antes de consentir / en que se case con vos, / el sepulcro, ¡juro a Dios!, / por mi mano la he de abrir." "Me hacéis reír, don Gonzalo," Don Juan impudently replies, "[...] o me la dais, o por Dios / que a quitárosla he de ir" (735-747). In short time, however, Don Juan experiences a change within himself that even he cannot explain, so won over is he by the daughter of the *Comendador*. On his knees before him he pleads to Don Gonzalo to hear him out: "su amor me torna en otro hombre / [...] / yo la daré un buen esposo, / y ella me dará el edén" (2508, 2528-2529). It is a change so outside of his character that it shocks Brígida and causes Don Luis and Don Gonzalo to mock and scorn him, leading to their deaths.

For her part, Sofía is not the suffering Romantic heroine, sacrificing all in the name of love. Although she might not be a virgin like Doña Inés, she is virginal (the love scenes between her and César are part of his dream). She playfully resists César's advances the night in her apartment. Furthermore, the astute Nuria observes that Sofía seems like one of those girls who "no encuentran la bragueta." Initially taken by César's looks and charm, after his accident her interest in him stops cold, a realistic reaction from a girl who had known someone for only a few hours. Nonetheless, her part in the drama is not to love César but to be loved by him. What she has done, similar to Doña Inés, is tame the libertine. In his cryonics-induced future dream world he does not continue the playboy lifestyle he had been living but rather chooses an idyllic domesticated sedentary life with her (and Pelayo), just as Don Juan desired to live with the Ulloa family. Ultimately, this type of life in the end cannot continue as destiny (and technology unable to dominate the human psyche) intervenes causing his imagined ideal existence to unravel.

Neither Don Juan nor César can comprehend the rapidity with which they have fallen in love. Don Juan marvels to Brígida, "Empezó por una apuesta, / siguió por un devaneo, / engendró luego un deseo, / y hoy me quema el corazón" (1310-1313). Similarly, César reveals to Antonio, his prison psychiatrist, his feelings towards Sofía: "Nadie lo va a entender. No lo entiendo ni yo... De pronto sentí esa estupidez que por lo visto le da a mucha gente." "¿Qué sentiste?" Antonio asks. "Que la quería. ¡Dios! Me da vergüenza hasta pronunciarlo." However, old libertine habits die hard. Don Juan, to win the next part of the bet, passes himself off as Don Luis under the cover of darkness and "conquers" Doña Ana after declaring to Brígida his love for Doña Inés. And César, for his part, enters Nuria's car believing he is going to her house for a sexual encounter after admitting to himself his love for Sofía.

Another common thread between *Don Juan Tenorio* and *Abre los ojos* is the absence of a respected father figure. Don Juan views his father and, initially, Don Gonzalo as he does all authority: as a contemptible obstacle to his endless striving for fame as the most illustrious scoundrel, and consequently something to be overcome or manipulated. He laughs in the face of his father, Don Diego Tenorio, who reveals to his son that he has disowned him because of his disgraceful lifestyle, scornfully rejecting his father's attempt at forgiveness: "mas ved que os quiero advertir / que yo no os he ido a pedir / jamás que me perdonéis. / [...]

/ que como vivió hasta aquí / vivirá siempre don Juan" (793-799).

César's father died when César was about 10 years old. His prison psychiatrist is the closest thing to a father figure that he has. Nonetheless, César speaks to the well-intentioned Antonio with disdain: "Me cae usted como el culo," he informs him, displaying the same lack of respect that Don Juan does towards Don Diego and Don Gonzalo. As Don Juan's attitude towards Don Gonzalo changes when he proclaims to him his love for his daughter, so does César's towards Antonio when he discovers that he can help him decipher the blurred "visions" of his past. Still, in the end, he "kills" the father figure when he elects to end his dream. Both Zorrilla and Amenábar demonstrate the consequences that result when one's self-centeredness creates an unbridgeable emotional chasm between him and the others in his life. The lack of a desire for a father figure contributes to César's postmodern groundlessness.

Zorrilla goes to great measures to emphasize the grand "fortuna" or "ventura" of Don Juan—understood as the inexplicable force that guides his endeavors to a successful conclusion. His unsurpassed good fortune inspires admiration in the populace of Sevilla and fear in Don Luis. Centellas announces to all: "no hay como Tenorio / otro hombre sobre la tierra, / y es proverbial su fortuna" (301-303). In response to Brígida's amazement over Don Juan's brazen kidnapping of Doña Inés from the convent his servant Ciutti replies "si a su lado / la fortuna siempre va, / y encadenado a sus pies / duerme sumiso el azar" (1950-1953). Much of Don Juan's "fortune" is of his own making; he has the cunning, audacity, and skill—and where those are insufficient, the money—to triumph in his schemes. In addition to all his earthly wherewithal, however, Don Juan is blessed with an innate luck that has accompanied him since birth: "la fortuna / va tras él desde la cuna" Don Juan boasts about himself (2777-2778).

So unfathomable is the fortune of Don Juan that it is described by all who come in contact with him as being Satanic in origin. Don Gonzalo, fearing for his daughter's welfare, calls him "hijo de Satanás" (1861). The person who knows Don Juan best, Ciutti, corrects Brígida, who observes that Don Juan has a "diablo familiar:" "Yo creo que sea él mismo / un diablo en carne mortal, / porque a lo que él, solamente / se arrojara Satanás" (1439-1443). Don Luis sums it up succinctly, revealing the true origin of his fear regarding his own fate: "¡Oh! Y a fe / que de don Juan me amedrenta / no el valor, mas la ventura. / Parece que le asegura / Satanás en cuanto intenta." (1039-1043). Eventually, Don Juan's luck comes to an end. The man whom the sculptor calls a "jugador con ventura" (2717), encompassing the double meaning of someone who is a lucky gambler and someone who gambles with fate, cannot defeat the odds forever. He dies at the hand of Centellas and faces the prospect of spending eternity in Hell.

Amenábar is not so quick to ascribe César's good fortune to any satanic power. Still he does present César as someone born under a fortunate sign with natural good looks, plenty of money, and the magical touch with women. With them he has the secret, "la fórmula de la Coca-Cola," as Pelayo puts it. The film opens with the beautiful Nuria in his bed although with this being her second time around he is already tired of her and clearly does not want to see her again. He bluntly orders her never to call him again adding "porque me toca los huevos." During their racquetball game Pelayo complains that César monopolizes the playing field: "Cuando te echa las redes una tía nos dejas el terreno libre a los demás." Unfortunately for César he takes one too many chances with Nuria, and his streak comes to an end in her car at the bottom of an embankment.

In Part One of the *Tenorio*, Don Juan's brazen fearlessness is an essential component of his success. In the tavern he brags about never fearing any man in a duel. He fought any man he wanted to or who wanted to fight him: "nunca consideré que pudo matarme a mí" (518-19). Don Juan lives for the thrill

of the challenge and is ultimately confident in bringing about the successful result of any undertaking, be it conquering women or defeating any man who would confront him possessing no moral compass that would cause him to consider the consequences of his actions beforehand. Moreover, he self-consciously brags about not fearing anything, natural or supernatural, and his actions back up his words. With supreme audacity he tricks his way into Doña Ana's bed, enters the convent and kidnaps Doña Inés, and invites the statue of the dead *Comendador* to dine with him: "Yo a nada tengo pavor" (3210). He maintains his scornful, defiant bravado when the statue actually shows up, that is until the moment he realizes that the ghost of the Comendador is his escort to Hell for his lifetime of sin.

César on the other hand is a lover, not a fighter. Nonetheless he is guilty of the same mortal sin as Don Juan: pride—"his male pride in his appearance, wealth and pulling power; his cocksure competitive streak" (Perriam 216). Nuria, in what turns out to be the crucial moment that leads to his downfall, goads the egotistic César into going home with her with the one simple question that she knows will get under his skin: "¿Tienes miedo?" It is pride not lust that motivates Don Juan to conquer women, pride in his ability to seduce and in the quantity of his conquests.

> La repetición, como dijo S. Freud, manifiesta un instante de muerte. Apliquemos esto a Don Juan y veremos explicada su compulsión a la burla, su ética de cantidad y no de la calidad. (Pérez-Bustamante 16)

And César's pride cannot let any woman perceive the slightest vulnerability in his hyper-masculinity, which causes him to commit his fatal error. So sure is he in his own desirability, César fails to perceive the danger signs apparent in the disjointed, postmodern we might say, approach that Nuria takes—her strange, sudden appearance outside Sofía's apartment and her "conversación transcendental" ("¿Qué es para ti la felicidad?" "¿Crees en Dios?") as she attempts lead both herself and César to their deaths.

In the scene in the bar with Pelayo and Sofía, César is forced to face the heretofore unthinkable: rejection. At this point Sofía wants nothing to do with him. César discards the prosthetic mask he had been wearing and goes to find solace in drinking himself blind. After finding the mask once again, he puts it on the back of his head, literally giving himself a second face. Amidst the pulsating beat of the music, Amenábar frames the silhouette of a profile view of César's head in a deep-blue backlighting. From this striking bit of cinematography, the audience distinguishes the two sides of César in this dark image: one ugly and the other one false. With the realization that the damage to his face is irreparable and unable to cope with having fallen from being admiringly fortunate to pitifully unfortunate, César commits suicide by taking an overdose of pills. One might say that Don Juan would never end his own life; he valued the adventures and conquests that it brought him. However, in this case it is not Don Juan who kills himself because he is already dead. César kills himself so that Don Juan can be revived again in the paradisiacal life that César had chosen when he signed Clause 14 with Life Extension. Even though he does not continue his Don Juan lifestyle in his dream world, his psyche is so tainted by the "emptiness of an image-based culture" (Thakkar 28) that he believes he would never be able to win Sofía without his accustomed Don Juan persona. Essentially César experiences two kinds of hell, both caused by his pride and arrogance: the devastating loss of his playboy existence after his accident and his dream world gone awry. In both instances he places his salvation in the hands of Life Extension, highlighting his postmodern detachment from the physical world.

As both Don Juans confront their hells—César's "living" nightmare and Don Juan's expectation of eternal punishment—a

miraculous and morally unmerited redemption arrives. In the pantheon Don Juan is visited by the *sombra* of Doña Inés who brings him a mixed message. She shows him the way to salvation: "Un punto se necesita / para morir con ventura" (3496-3497), but at the same time warns him of the choice he must make: "y ve que si piensas bien, / a tu lado me tendrás; / mas si obras mal, causarás / nuestra eterna desventura" (3016-3019). Unaware that he is dying after his duel with Centellas, Don Juan begins to doubt his own reason for being and suspect that there truly is a God: "¡Jamás mi orgullo concibió que hubiere / nada más que el valor!... Que aniquila / el alma con el cuerpo cuando muere / creí…, mas hoy mi corazón vacila" (3617-3619). As the statue of the Comendador prepares to escort him to Hell, Don Juan shouts his belief in God and begs him for mercy. With the gravity of his fate weighing down on him Don Juan pleads with the Almighty: "yo, Santo Dios, Creo en Ti; / si es mi maldad inaudita, / tu piedad es infinita... / ¡Señor, ten piedad de mí!" (3766-3769). He falls to his knees and holds one hand up to heaven. The angelic Doña Inés, now converted literally into an angel (Gies 54), takes it and informs him that in his final seconds of life God has forgiven him and he is saved.

Jose Alberich challenges the common notion that Don Juan was saved by love. He asserts that it is not love but "un golpe de gracia sobrenatural"—divine intervention—based on the theologically unjustifiable cult of the "novia inmaculada" or "futura esposa-sacerdotisa" (22). The theological dubiousness of such a salvation aside, the *deus ex machina* ending of *Don Juan Tenorio* is echoed in *Abre los ojos*. At the culmination of his torturous dream César and Antonio visit the offices of Life Extension, and the pieces to the horror start to fall into place. As with *Don Juan Tenorio*, salvation comes from on high. César, at the foot of the Torre Picasso, notices a figure on the roof of the sky scraper. Here, Mr. Duvernois, the spokesman for Life Extension, plays the role of the messenger angel. He fills in the lacunae of César's memory and offers him the choice of either fixing his dream or living in the real world. César also offers up his own "prayer" to the Gods of technology—mysterious and seemingly all-powerful technicians of Life Extension who know even César's thoughts: "Que esos ahí fuera lean mi mente." His supplication is answered, and he wakes up in the unknown and unseen yet seemingly ideal "paradise" of 2145 where doctors can repair his fractured face.

We will now switch our focus from the parallels of character and theme between the two works to that of narrative structure. Essentially, Part One of *Don Juan Tenorio* takes place in the natural world whereas Part Two is predominated by the supernatural. George Mansour points out parallels between them:

> Thematic unity is supported by parallel development in the two parts to the play. Parallelism [...] refers to the technique by which Zorrilla reworks dramatic situations of Part One and reproduces them in Part Two shifting the focus from life to death. (245)

Among the several examples he provides is the following passage from Part One, which Don Juan repeats in Part Two with only a slight variation:

> Por dondequiera que fui,
> la razón atropellé,
> la virtud escarnecí
> a la justicia burlé,
> y a las mujeres vendí.
> Yo a las cabañas bajé,
> yo a los palacios subí,
> yo los claustros escalé,
> y en todas partes dejé
> memoria amarga de mí. (501-510)

In Part One Don Juan is boasting of his roguishness and of the boundlessness of his conquests, evidence of his fall from God's grace. In Part Two the first line begins with a sorrowful "¡Ah!" and the last two lines are replaced with "y pues tal mi vida fue / no, no hay perdón para mí." (3728-3737). At this

point Don Juan expresses regret for a life of folly and dread for the horrible fate that is to come, which leads to his first step towards contrition and eventual salvation.

In a similar vein *Abre los ojos* can be divided into two parts: part one is César's natural life, and part two is his dream afterlife. In both works the two parts are separated by a significant passing of time that allows for important changes to occur: the conversion of the Tenorio family palace into a pantheon for Don Juan and the development of the technology necessary to revive César. Both protagonists return to familiar settings that have been eerily altered and which are now home to the ghosts of their co-protagonists of the past. In the film there occurs a mirroring of certain phrases, that when repeated in the second part serve to establish a frightening psychological connection between the two lives. When Nuria poses the questions, "¿Qué es para ti la felicidad?" and "¿Crees en Dios?", they are quick, horrific views into her troubled soul and a prelude to the disaster she is about to inflict. In the second part they are ostensibly a tool used by Antonio to recover the lost memory of the murder that César is accused of having committed. Instead they serve only to intensify César's pain and bewilderment inducing a stabbing, rapid flashback to the moment before the crash.

Because Antonio does not really exist, that he is part of the dream world established by Life Extension in response to the mental stimuli given them by César, it is apparent that these questions are memories, clues to César's nightmare. The specter of the Comendador, a victim of Don Juan's insensitive vengeance, returns as a ghostly reminder of past transgressions and future punishment. The sudden appearance of Nuria, a victim of César's insensitive vanity, in the place of Sofía now haunts his previously peaceful and happy life. During the fight between César and Pelayo outside the police station after César had purportedly hit Sofía, Pelayo screams at César: "¡Me la robaste!" In visual, seemingly real form, the memories of the two people that César had most wronged in part one, Nuria and Pelayo, come back to torment him in part two.

Early in the film, while playing racquetball, Pelayo complains about his own physical plainness compared to César, who patronizes Pelayo by telling him that many people would trade their faces for his, that he is completely normal, and that he is like those anorexic girls who think they are fat and wind up driving themselves crazy. As the film speeds towards its climax, Antonio asks César to remove the prosthetic mask he has been wearing since they first met, insisting he let him see his face, to which César finally obliges. With the camera angle behind César, Antonio shows no repugnance at what he sees and assures César that his face is fine. César looks in the mirror and again sees his disfigured face, "Soy un monstruo" and falls into a heap on the floor. Antonio, failing to see any disfigurement in César, in an ironic twist pierces César's psyche with the first dagger as he repeats verbatim what César said to Pelayo a century and a half earlier: "Mucha gente cambiaría su cara por la tuya. Eres completamente normal." The second dagger sends the desperate, hysterical César into a frenzy: "Hay chicas que se empeñan en verse gordas, y acaban volviéndose locas."

Finally, the signature trope of *Abre los ojos*, the blurring the line between the real and the unreal, is integral also in the supernatural second part of *Don Juan Tenorio*. Judith Arias observes:

> In part two the intermingling of reality and illusion is so blatant Don Juan cannot distinguish between them: '¡Es realidad, o [deliro]!' he cries when the vivified Statue confronts him (3402); 'pues no la veo, sueño es', he later protests in response to the apparition of Doña Inés' spirit (3491). (Arias 30)

In a scene reminiscent of the frantic César screaming, "¡Quiero despertar! ¡Quiero despertar!" Don Juan struggles to discern reality from dream. Arias adds,

> Finally, in desperation he pleads,
> Tente, doña Inés, espera;
> y si me amas de verdad,
> hazme al fin la realidad
> distinguir de la quimera (3502-3505). (Arias 30)

Both works challenge the epistemological conception of reality and existence. César struggles to achieve and then ultimately reject the existence he has chosen for himself, in the end questioning the meaning of existence itself. Pérez-Bustamante, referring to the numerous denouments that have been applied to the Don Juan story, notes that

> desde el Romanticismo, es decir, desde que se abre la Edad Contemporánea, el problema de don Juan salta de la esfera teológica a la esfera existencial, somos cada vez más conscientes de que al fondo de su mito es el conflicto entre el principio de la realidad (causalidad, finalidad, temporalidad) y la compulsión instintiva a negar este principio. (20)

In spite of the fact that both protagonists state clearly that they do not believe in God they revel in antagonizing him. Don Juan's blatant animosity towards God is well established in *Don Juan Tenorio*, making his final salvation that much more remarkable. As well, César playfully threatens the Almighty: "Te voy a dar," when Pelayo tells him God has punished him by making him miss a shot at racquetball. Furthermore, César answers flatly, "No" to Antonio's question, "¿Crees en Dios?"

It is apparent that at the conclusion of the *Tenorio*, Don Juan performs an act of contrition and is allowed to enter heaven by the grace of God. How might one explain César's "salvation"? It is not a salvation in a Christian sense. He is saved from his nightmare and passes on to the "next life" in a seemingly paradisiacal future. On one hand, in the secular Spain of the late twentieth century technology is the new Deity. The dream life of *Abre los ojos* has a supernatural quality because it is enabled by a technology that has not been invented yet; it can only be imagined or theorized, similar to the Christian concept of heaven. On the other hand, from a Christian standpoint, César's salvation is still up in the air. His nightmare has been brought on by a sense of guilt about past wrongs, a kind of "contrition" perhaps. If he has learned anything from his ordeal, if his "ideal future" turns out to be his "ghost of Christmas future," then César might be given yet one more chance at redemption. If, however, he continues his pre-accident ways with his newly-restored face, then his post-future eternity will be a fiery one.

Amenábar and Zorrilla contend that one is responsible for his own "hell" stemming from one's lack of anything substantial to grasp on to, either faith in God or more specifically a true, loving, reciprocally beneficial relationship with an "other." Heartbreak and tragedy result when arrogance and ungrounded freedom blind them to the understanding that a mere touch of prudence and humility would save their lives. Both Don Juan and César reject God and refuse to nurture relationships with the important people in their lives. César's disconnection with the "real" world is emphasized at both the beginning and ending of Abre los ojos. As the film opens, César wanders through the eerie void of a mysteriously empty Gran Vía, a majestic Madrid street emblematic of a more traditional or "postcard" vision of Spain, gazing confused at its nineteenth-century architecture. At the film's conclusion around and atop the Torre Picasso, representative of the modern world of technology and commerce, a space occupied only by the virtual figures of the principal characters and with a view of a suddenly unpopulated Madrid, César finds that this solution is just as devoid of humanity. Placing his faith in the final offer of salvation from Life Extension, he leaps from the sky scraper in an ironic free fall that is intended to cease his unrelenting descent into hell.

Abre los ojos follows along the path blazed by the Don Juan stories that have

come before, especially Zorrilla's *Don Juan Tenorio*. César is the Don Juan of dawn of the twenty-first century, still embodying the same morally dubious characteristics that have attracted audiences for centuries, this time conveyed through the lens of science fiction and science fantasy. While making his film, Amenábar undoubtedly embraced many modern influences exterior to Spain; nevertheless, his story emanates from its very soul: there is no story more "Spanish" than *Don Juan*. Amenábar's César is one more stage in what Pérez-Bustamante terms as "las metamorfosis de Don Juan a través de la historia de la literatura" (21), a postmodern addition to the ever-growing, ever-adapting gallery of the famous rogue.

Notes

[1]For a general discussion of intertextual elements of the film see, for example, Rivero-Moreno 133-141, Martín 93-98, Knollmeyer 206-207. García de la Rasilla suggests the film as a useful accompaniment to the study of Calderón (73-75).

[2]See also Pérez-Bustamante 11-24.

[3]For references to the text, I use the line numberings in David Gies' edition.

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