

Don Juan will always live

THE SPANISH
ARCHETYPE AND
EUROPEAN
INTERPRETATIONS

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Who is Don Juan?

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The character of Don Juan originated in 17th-century Spanish theater, becoming a universal myth and symbol as men began to recognize themselves in his deep anthropological roots, and authors started to explain themselves through him.

LITERARY PRECURSORS

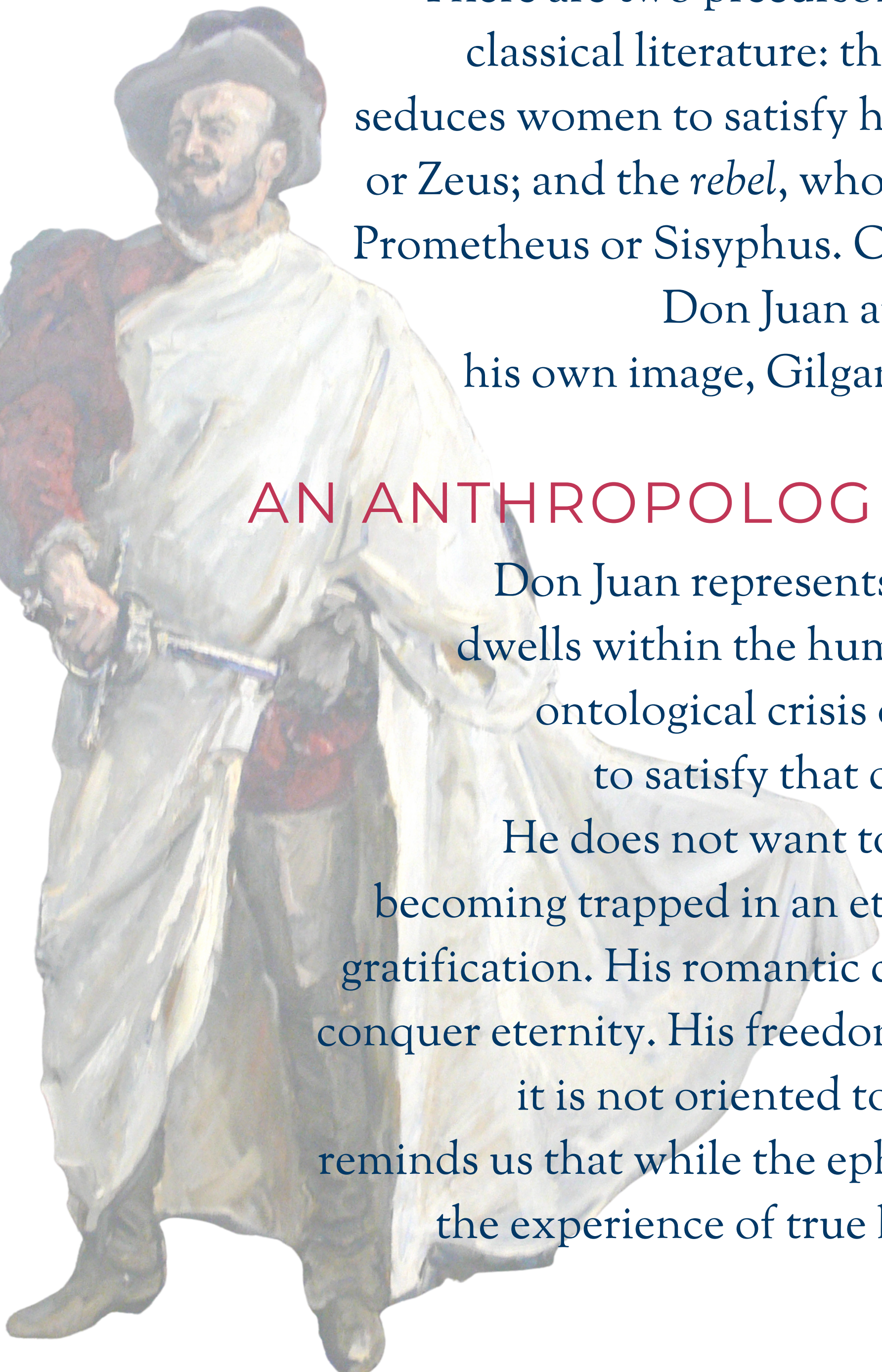
There are two precursors of Don Juan's identity in classical literature: the *conqueror*, a libertine who seduces women to satisfy his passions, such as Enkidú or Zeus; and the *rebel*, who defies gods and *fatum*, like Prometheus or Sisyphus. Other characters resembling

Don Juan are Narcissus, consumed by his own image, Gilgamesh, Adan or King David.

AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACH

Don Juan represents the desire for infinity that dwells within the human heart. He manifests the ontological crisis of modern man, who seeks to satisfy that desire through his own self.

He does not want to live, but to feel alive, thus becoming trapped in an eternal present of immediate gratification. His romantic conquests are an attempt to conquer eternity. His freedom becomes slavery because it is not oriented towards goodness. Don Juan reminds us that while the ephemeral can entertain, only the experience of true love grants true happiness.



The myth: three keys of interpretation



RELIGION

Don Juan's relationship with God is characterized as one of rejection and arrogance. He lives by his own laws according to his own criteria. In many versions of the myth, this distancing from God is associated with the figure of the devil, presenting Don Juan as the devil incarnate.



LOVE

For Don Juan, women do not have specific faces, but are rather diluted into an abstract homogeneity. For him, love is about pleasure and possession, an instrument for experiencing his own existence.



TIME

Every version of the story is a countdown towards Don Juan's end, revealing one of the key dilemmas of human existence: every action has consequences. Don Juan highlights the reality of man, who cannot live forever without concern for his responsibilities and will have to face judgement for his actions.

Don Juan in Europe

SPAIN

The figure of Don Juan is one of the greatest gifts our race has given to the world. He represents one of the few cardinal themes of universal art that the Modern Age has managed to invent and add to the sacred treasure of the Greco-Latin heritage.

Introduction to a Don Juan, Ortega y Gasset.

WHY IN SPAIN?

In Spain, the myth is heir of the Golden Age tradition, so the subject of death takes on fundamental importance. The various works all have a marked didactic-moral function considering the salvation of the soul. There are some antecedents in elements such as seductive mockery or defiance of the dead, as in the romance of the skull or *El infamador* of De la Cueva.

EL BURLADOR DE SEVILLA Y CONVIDADO DE PIEDRA

TIRSO DE MOLINA (C. 1620)



Divine justice is the moral axis of the work, characteristic of the Counter-Reformation Baroque period.



Don Juan never falls in love. He disguises his identity or makes promises of marriage.



He thinks that death is far away and that he can live carefree. His most iconic sentence is: “You give me so much time”.

Don Juan in Europe

SPAIN

EL ESTUDIANTE DE SALAMANCA

JOSÉ DE ESPRONCEDA (1840)



This Don Juan embodies the absolute rebellion of Romanticism, making him a demonic figure.



Love is portrayed as a destructive force. Elvira dies of grief after being abandoned, and Don Félix's final immoral act, kissing Elvira's skull, leads to his own death.



In the fourth part, Don Félix enters a timeless space following the specter on a journey that leads him to his death.

DON JUAN TENORIO

JOSÉ DE ZORRILLA (1844)



This Don Juan, influenced by Romanticism, highlights divine mercy, as it ends with don Juan's salvation.



Doña Inés awakes in Don Juan a true love that will become the center of his redemption.



This play is divided into two parts: the first act is characterized by hurried and violent action; followed by a second characterized by introspection.



Don Juan in Europe

FRANCE

DOM JUAN OU LE FESTIN DU PIERRE

MOLIÈRE (1665)

In this interpretation of the myth, Don Juan is an atheist.
For him, piety and morals are objects of mockery and his
skepticism prevents any repentance.



More than the conquest of women, this Don Juan loves
the speech and the process of manipulation
in conquest.



Don Juan, as a libertine and a hypocrite, spends his life
trying to escape the consequences of his actions.



DON JUAN AUX LES ENFERS

BAUDELAIRE (1857)

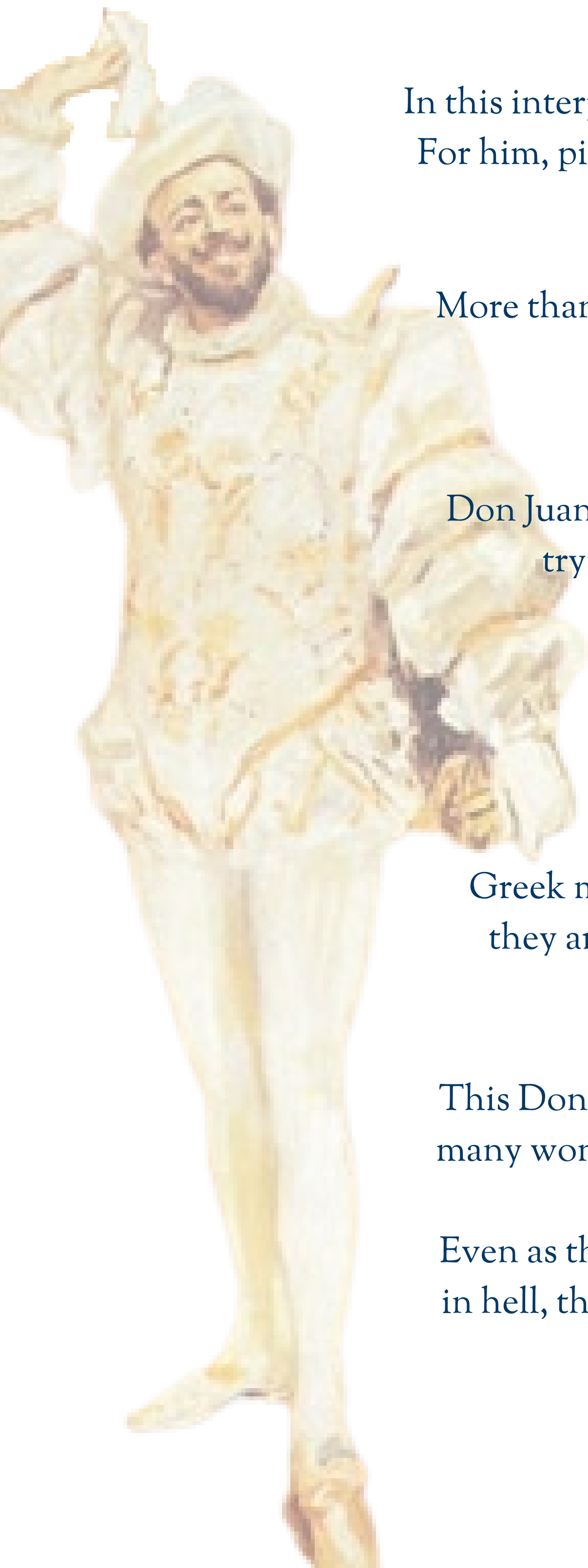
Greek mythology has great influence in this poem, as
they are *aux enfers* but the description of the place is
closer to Hades than to Christian hell.



This Don Juan has not loved and stays impassive to the
many women he has seduced into their death sentence.



Even as the poem takes place when Don Juan is already
in hell, the presence of certain characters tells the story
of his deceit.



Don Juan in Europe

ENGLAND

In England the most famous interpretation of the myth is Lord Byron's. In fact, this Don Juan reflects the spirit of Romanticism, presented as an outcast whose actions are determined by some sort of tragic destiny.

DON JUAN

LORD BYRON (1879)



Pagan faith blends with Christian morality and expressions.



What this Don Juan loves, more than women themselves, is the pursuit of what is forbidden or socially reprehensible. Here we see him as the one seduced rather than the seducer.



His life can be described as a series of adventures worthy of a romantic hero. When death is upon him, he is not repentant but proud.





Don Juan in Europe

ITALY

This was the first country where the myth spread because of the Spanish relationship with the Kingdom of Naples. The seducer found fertile ground in Italian culture because the motif of the “stone guest” was already part of their popular tradition.

IL CONVITATO DI PIETRA

GIACINTO ANDREA CICOGNINI (C. 1632)



The religious tone of the Spanish model is absent. Punishment appears more like a force of destiny than God’s intervention.



There is no true love in Don Giovanni; women as objects of conquest. The difference here is that Italian women do not remain passive but try to defend themselves.



The experience of time, which Don Giovanni believes to be eternal, is interrupted by the appearance of the statue.

DON GIOVANNI TENORIO, IL DISSOLUTO

CARLO GOLDONI (1736)

Goldoni tried to stop with the fantastic phenomena that surrounded Don Juan by killing him with a bolt of lightning, which was not popular with audiences.

IL DISSOLUTO PUNITO

LORENZO DA PONTE (1787)

This was the libretto Mozart used to compose his famous opera. Legend has it he was inspired by his friend Giacomo Casanova.

Don Juan in Europe

AUSTRIA AND GERMANY

I fell into a kind of somnambulistic trance in the presence of this astonishing woman, a trance wherein I discerned mysterious connections that bound me so intimately to her that she herself had been unable to abandon me during her appearance on stage - Hoffman.

DON GIOVANNI

MOZART (1787)



Don Giovanni ignores God and morality until he faces the statue of the prelate, but even in this moment he defies God.



Don Giovanni loves to use his title and social position to take advantage of women's innocence.

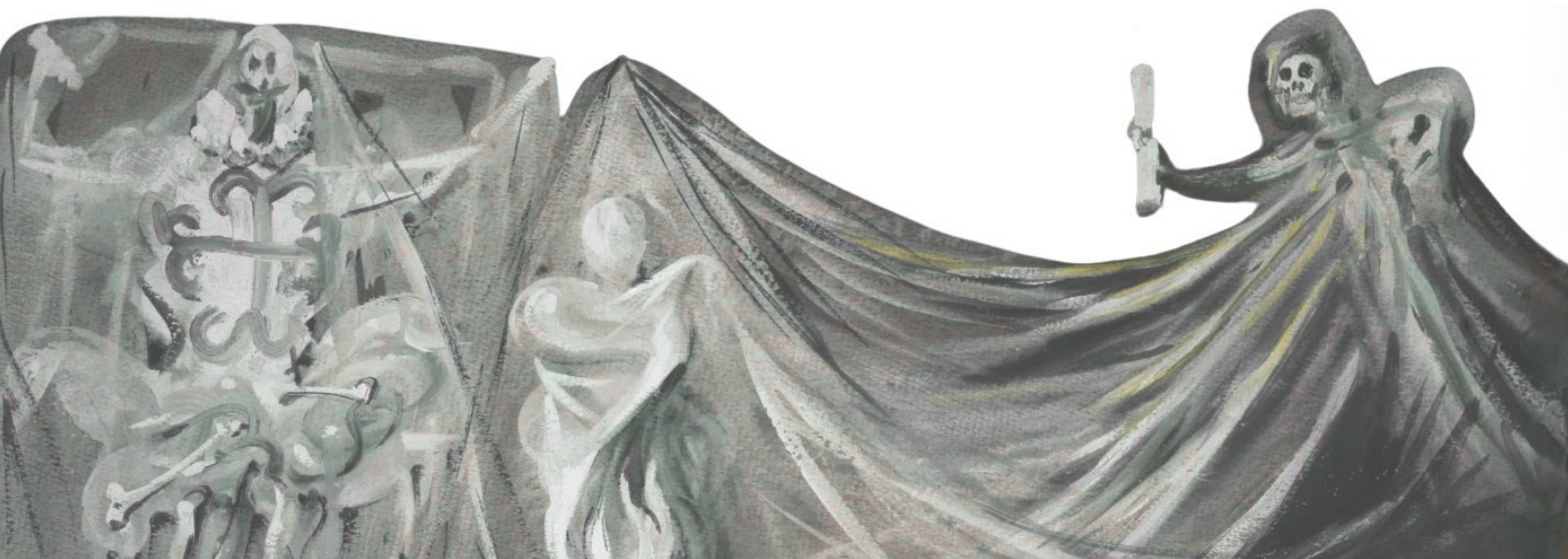


Instead of facing the consequences of his actions, Don Giovanni blames others or tricks them, pretending to be who he is not.

However, Doña Ana and Doña Elvira chase him like ghosts from his past, determined to make him pay for his sins.

FUN FACT: HOFFMAN'S DON JUAN

Hoffman's Don Juan is a tale about the impression the character has while attending the opera to see Mozart's "Don Giovanni."



Don Juan in Europe

DENMARK AND RUSSIA

FORFØRERENS DAGBOG

SØREN KIERKEGAARD (1843)



Johannes shows us the emptiness of a man who lives without reference to the divine. His life revolves around the immediacy of aesthetic enjoyment while avoiding ethical and religious commitment.



Love is presented as a manipulative experience. Johannes seeks to psychologically dominate Cordelia to make her emotionally dependent on him.



His time is circular and repetitive; his interest vanishes when desire ceases to be a possibility and becomes reality.

КАМЕННЫЙ ГОСТЬ (KAMENNY GOST)

ALEKSANDR PUSHKIN (1830)



There is no direct reference to God in this play, although the characters continue living by religious morals. There are traces of the fantastic, a signature element of Russian Romanticism.



Don Juan falls deeply in love with Doña Ana, a married woman. This forbidden love leads to a duel in which he kills her husband, Don Carlos. Some time later, Don Juan returns to seek out Doña Ana at her husband's grave.



Time is a countdown. Don Juan kills Don Carlos, and his statue ultimately kills Don Juan. Hence the title of the play: "The stone guest" rather than Don Juan.

Don Juan today

THE ARCHETYPE IN TODAY'S LANGUAGE

What I wish to show is how we have been unable, in this and the previous century, to consider Don Juan without the gloomy and melancholic aspect of his being. The most recent portrayals of Don Juan seem to highlight the loneliness and melancholy of the postmodern man. It is about Don Juans who inhabit a world in which God has died, after the end of great tales.



Or watch it here:

<https://www.ufv.es/extension-universitaria/actividades-culturales/>

Quizz: Which Don Juan should you read?



[Click here](#)

