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THE ONE, THE ONLY, THE ORIGINAL DON JUAN

About a year and a half ago, [**December, 2006**] the Donmar Warehouse in London, one of the most creative and innovative theatrical companies in the world, presented a brand new play with a plot so old that, under normal circumstances, it should have died centuries ago. It is the story of a young man who is described in the theater notes as an "infamous, amoral hedonist," a promiscuous, heartless sexual predator who suffers a hideous punishment for refusing to repent his crimes.

This unappealing character goes by the initials, D.J. As the play opens, D.J. is hanging out at an expensive little hotel in Soho, an area of London known for trendy restaurants, raunchy sex shows, recreational drugs and cruising prostitutes. D.J. employs a side-kick named Stan who acts as a half-hearted sort of bodyguard. Stan fetches drinks, lights D.J.'s cigarettes, brags, tells lies, pimps for his boss, and occasionally crawls in bed with D.J. when there is a momentary shortage of girls. Before we ever encounter the leading man, Stan tells the audience that D.J. has just abandoned his most recent wife, an Irish girl named

Elvira, and, at this moment, is upstairs in the penthouse suite of the hotel, "banging a Croatian supermodel."

Stan is about as unlovable as D.J. --- disloyal, cowardly, wingeing and indifferent to everything but his unpaid wages. He says of his boss: "All he lives for is chasing skirt and once in a blue moon, trouser …Apart from a brief hiatus last winter [**when D.J. had syphilis**], he's had, on average, three different women a day for more than two decades --- you do the maths."

Stan ought to know, because he maintains D.J.'s fornication records, including the girls' grades, on a Blackberry. The Croatian supermodel gets a C. But in D.J.'s opinion, the only qualitative distinction among women is "fuckable" and "unfuckable."

Elvira, D.J.'s deserted wife, tracks him down and pleads for affection.. D.J. waves her off with a contemptuous sneer. Catching sight of a new prospect, definitely a fox, he rents a speedboat to join a party celebrating that girl's wedding in a barge on the Thames. He rams the barge with his boat, accidentally killing the girl's fiancé, and then, dripping wet in an emergency hospital on the river bank, he courts the distraught bride with promises of eternal love while yet another woman fellates him under a blanket.

By this point, even if you failed to read the attribution in the theater program, you will have perceived that this unpleasant play is simply a new version of the story that inspired such diverse works as Moliere's play *Don Juan*, Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni,* Byron's epic poem *Don Juan,* George Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman,* Charles Baudelaire's poem *Don Juan aux enfers,* Richard Strauss's tone poem *Don Juan,* and, not too long ago, Francis Ford Coppola's movie *Don Juan De Marco,* starring Johnny Depp as a sexually athletic adolescent who receives meretricious psychological counseling from Marlon Brando.. (**Rated PG-13.**)

Patrick Marber's *Don Juan in Soho* is openly and slavishly adapted from Moliere's version, properly called *Dom Juan,* a classic tragic-comedy dating from the 17th Century. If you have seen or read that play, you will anticipate that Marber's hero, like Moliere's, is destined to be pursued by the brother of the

mistreated wife, Elvira; that he will be accosted by a moving statue of the man he killed; and that he will meet a horrible death without the promise of salvation.

When Marber's lewd show opened in December, 2006, it could claim to be the very latest variation of the classic tale, but it held that record for only a few months. Within the next year, the Berkeley Repertory Theater presented a take-off by the Theatre de la Jeune Moon that incorporated TWO all-purpose man-servants and TWO dons -- the Italian one of Mozart and the French one of Moliere -- and some snatches of music. At about the same time, an Italian playwright named Vittorio Caratozzolo published a new work of scholarship called *Five Variations on DaPonte and Mozart's 'Don Giovanni.'* [**Cinque variazione sul 'Don Giovanni' di DaPonte/Mozart**] And a just few months ago, there appeared on the Internet several paragraphs from a novel called *The Lost Diary of Don Juan,* posted by a 41-year-old writer named Donald Carlton Abrams, who lives in Santa Cruz, California. I have not read Mr. Abrams's version of the Don Juan story, but you can find excerpts of it in his blog, which is dedicated "to the promulgation of romantic sex.."

To say that the list goes on and on is a cliché, but not an exaggeration. Since the first literary appearance of Don Juan as a horny adolescent Spanish aristocrat four centuries ago, he has been one of the most interpreted, debated and retrofitted literary characters in Western culture. He accommodates changes in fashion, culture and moral climate. He is as permanent, as generic, in his nasty way, as such literary monuments as Faust, Ulysses or Cinderella. Generations of novelists, essayists, poets and composers have put their stamp on his story in French, German, Italian, Spanish, Swedish, English, Latin and more. A few years ago, one American scholar, trying to update the bibliography of Don Juan, counted 2605 treatments of the subject, and he did not enumerate hundreds of translations from one language to another. The major variations that he found included not only Moliere's play and Mozart's opera but also a play by the Italian Carlo Goldoni [**1736**]; ballets by Christoph Willibald Gluck and by Leo Delibes; a play in verse by Aleksandr Pushkin, (which was made into a seldom-performed opera with music by Aleksandr Dargomyzhsky and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov); a

play by Alexandre Dumas; a *zaruela* based on a play by the Spaniard Jose Zorilla; at least a dozen additional operas in Italian, French, German and Russian; several pantomimes of the wordless French type; and one notorious pantomime of the satirical British type.

The Zorzilla version, *Don Juan Tenorio,* dating from the mid-Nineteenth Century (**1844**), has become one of the most popular and frequently performed works in Spanish literature. It is usually played with elaborate sets and costumes on All Souls Night (Halloween) in Mexico, South America and all many parts of Spain. The British panto, which first appeared in 1817, was billed as England's first professional version of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. It was called "*Giovanni, or a Spectre on Horseback,* and was subtitled: "A Comic, Heroic, Operatic, Tragic, Pantomimic, Burlettta-Spectacular Extravaganza." Fortunately, it seems to have disappeared from Britain's traditional repertoire of holiday-season Pantos.

The name **Don Giovanni** currently brings up four million, 510 thousand references in Google's data search. Among them is a bistro in the Napa Valley. The name **Don Juan** produces twelve million, 800 thousand references, including many quotes from Lord Byron's poem and an advertisement for a service called the Don Juan Center --- "Learn the Secrets of Meeting, Dating and Attracting Women " **Don Juan Tenorio,** your basic Spanish text, gets a mere 332 thousand references.

Of course, there also have been many **Don Juan** movies. The very first appears to have been a silent film made in Spain in 1922 and based on Zorilla's play. The first Hollywood production, released in 1926, starred John Barrymore as a gigolo who is transformed into a pussycat by a good woman after he has run through a series of dalliances with Jane Winton, Myrna Loy, Mary Astor and Hedda Hopper. The Barrymore Don Juan was black-and-white and silent, but it included an appropriately chosen musical introduction from Wagner's opera, *Tannhauser* (another story of dalliance and punishment) making it the first movie with a sound track on film. Douglas Fairbanks, Sr. and Errol Flynn took their turns in the lead role in black-and-white and in color. Ingmar Bergman wrote and directed a Swedish version called *The Devil's Eye* (**1960**) and the

French director Roger Vadim created a vehicle for his favorite star, Brigitte Bardot, called in English **If Don Juan Were a Woman**. (**1973**)

Legend is that the first Don Juan was a living person – a licentious nobleman who was notorious for his adventures on the sex circuit during the golden age of Spain. The story of his crimes and his punishment was dramatized by a Catholic monk --- Brother Gabriel Tellez, of Our Lady of Mercy, the Mercedarian order, [**b. Madrid, 1580, d. Almazan, 1648**] --- who wrote prolifically and successfully under the pen name, Tirso De Molina.

Presumably, Tellez camouflaged his identity because monks were not supposed to be writing plays, especially plays about the sex lives of aristocrats. Brother Gabriel is fondly remembered in Spain by his assumed name. There is a popular tapas bar called Tirso de Molina not far from the museum of the Prado in Madrid.

Tirso de Molina named his hero Juan Tenorio and called the play *El Burlador de Sevilla y el Convidado de Piedra,* which translates out of my virtually non-existent Spanish as ***The Rascal of Seville and The Dinner Guest Made of Stone."*** The word "*burlador*" is usually translated as "trickster" – that is, a miscreant rather than a rapist --- or, in other words, an opportunist rather than a predator. As such, Tirso de Molina's Don Juan was recognizable to his Spanish audience as a *picaro* or picaroon. In the world literature of picaroons, the leading character is invariably a reckless young rough-neck whose game is to *burlar* other people, to deceive them, play mean tricks on them, take money off them and fight his way up the social ladder to a life of ease and respectability. For a mischievous *picaro* to flaunt legal and moral standards, to mock religion and defy punishment was in the finest Spanish literary tradition. Many versions of the Don Juan Tenorio story have him dressing in his servant's clothes to fool his pursuers, playing one woman against another, thwarting bill collectors --- generally being more mischievous than cruel, more carefree than evil.

In the Tirso play, Don Juan Tenorio travels from place to place, playing tricks and wowing women. As a lusty young buck, exercising his itchy places, he is forgivable. But he goes too far. In a sword fight, he accidentally kills the father

of one of his conquests. The old man shows up as a statue, mouthing curses on his killer. Juan, in a show of bravado and Spanish chivalry, invites the statue to supper. The statue accepts the invitation, then demands that Juan publicly renounce his life style, and, when Juan refuses, grabs him in a stony grip and drags him straight down to hell, through an open trap door belching smoke and flame..

The moral of Tirso's story is clear: Even a titled gentleman will be punished for shagging other men's wives and daughters, killing their indignant parents and, especially, for refusing to say sorry. .

The tradition is that Tirso's play was first performed in 1630. It immediately spawned numerous imitations, as was usual in those days of touring theatrical groups, oral communication and lack of copyright on intellectual property.. Several more versions in Spanish, Italian and French, generally called or subtitled "The Stone Guest," ensued. Some versions added music, ballet, comic routines and pantomime in the style of the Italian *commedia d' arte*. Don Juan's servant, whose name was sometimes changed to fit the preference of the performers, played a comic role as the nagging conscience as well as the artful accomplice of the hero.

Thirty-five years after Tirso, the French actor-writer-director Jean Baptiste Poquelin, better known by his stage name, Moliere, wrote and presented his own version of the Don Juan legend to the court of Louis XIV. The year was 1665. Moliere called his play *Dom Juan ou le festin de pierre* --- that is, "Don Juan or The Stone Guest." The title suggests it was another re-hash of Tirso's Catholic morality play, with an avenging role for the visiting statue. But Moliere, who was writing at a time when the pretensions of the aristocracy were unpopular with the Sun King and his court, took the opportunity to poke fun at pompous noblemen and religious hypocrites, a couple of his favorite targets.

In Moliere's play, the manservant, whom Moliere names Sganarelle, becomes the most important character, a pious and pessimistic contrast to Don Juan's irreligion and egotistical optimism. The role of Sganarelle was played by Moliere, himself, who had created this character in an earlier play and used him

again as one of the principal characters in *Le Medecin malgre lui* -- "The Doctor in spite of himself." Sganarelle is a commoner, out of his class in the world of aristocratic privilege. He also is superstitious, gossipy, disloyal, hypocritical and stupid – and he gets all the best lines. It is Sganarelle who boasts about his master's conquests while deploring them; Sganarelle who aids and abets Don Juan's schemes, meanwhile warning that he will be punished in hell; and, when the sinner is at last devoured in a surge of fireworks, it is Sganarelle who intones the famous curtain line: "Everyone else is satisfied by his death. I am the only one to suffer. After so many years' service, I have no other reward than to see my master punished. But who will pay my wages?"

Sganarelle opens the play with an update on his master's exploits, most recently his success in luring the virginal Donna Elvira out of a convent to marry him, then quickly deserting her. To Sganarelle this demonstrates that Don Juan is "the greatest scoundrel who ever walked the earth…a madman, a dog, a devil, a Turk. He is a heretic who believes in neither Heaven, nor saint, nor God, nor the bogeyman. He lives his life as an absolute brute beast…One day the wrath of Heaven will strike him…" And Sganarelle offers an excuse for his own complicity: "But I must be faithful to him, however I feel. Fear makes me his accomplice."

Juan, on the other hand, thinks it would be downright selfish to deny the gift of his attentions to any woman in need.

" Every pretty woman has a right to attract us," he tells Sganarelle, "and the mere accident of being seen first should not rob the others of their privilege of subjugating our hearts."

Juan has designs on a couple of good-looking peasant girls, but his persistent wife Donna Elvira shows up and starts complaining about hurt feelings and other female issues like being abandoned. Always the trickster, Juan confounds her by claiming that it was ***she***, not he, who was the sinner in their escapade because she broke her vows and left the convent. He pretends that it is his duty to end their relationship so Elvira can get back to her duties to God.

"Will you dare to oppose such a holy purpose, Madame?" Juan asks.

And poor Elvira cries, in helpless indignation: “Oh, what a scoundrel! At last I see you as you really are…The Heaven you mock will avenge me for your faithlessness.”

“*Heaven*!” says Juan. “Fancy that, Sganarelle!”

And the slimy, collusive, mean-spirited Sganarelle chimes in: “Yeah. We snap our fingers at it.”

All the same, Sganarelle frequently urges Juan to change his style of before it’s too late.

Don Juan, irritated, retorts: “What sort of life do I lead?”

Sganarelle quickly answers: “Oh, a very good life. But, for instance, this trick you have of getting married every month or so?”

“Could anything be more delightful?” says Don Juan. And Sganarelle rushes to agree:: “Oh, no. I admit that it’s very delightful and very amusing, and it would suit me well enough, if there were no harm in it. But, Sir, to trifle like that with a sacred sacrament----“

. To stretch this sort of banter into a five-act play, Moliere adds a couple of comedy routines that have become classics. Planning his seduction of the two peasant girls, Juan proposes marriage separately to each of them, meanwhile telling both of them that the other is crazy in thinking he wants to marry her. Later, Juan and Sganarelle fend off a creditor by flattering him, diverting his attention and changing the subject, until the befuddled man forgets to present his bill.

[**These scenes appear, in distinctly different form, in Marber’s *Don Juan in Soho*. and if you think you have seen similar routines done by Laurel and Hardy or Abbot and Costello, you are probably right**.]

After a few performances, Moliere’s play was banned in France and seldom seen for a century. But the adventures of the ever-lovable Don Juan continued in ballets, plays and poetry and a vast number of operas, most of which are now lost or forgotten.. In England a one-time poet laureate named Thomas Shadwell penned a repulsive tragedy called *The Libertine* [**1676**] for the bloodthirsty playgoers of the Restoration period. In this short-lived production,,

the wicked Juan (pronounced in the British style *don'dzu: an)* is a drunkard, glutton, arsonist and rapist as well as a murderer. To make things worse, Dzoo-whan is never really satisfied by his erotic experiences. He just gets a charge out of cruelty to women.. He boasts of one of his conquests: "Mine, my lads, was such a rape it ought to be registered, a noble and heroic rape."

It was more than a century later when Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart decided to write an opera on a character he knew by the Italian name Don Giovanni. By that time, Mozart had better, prettier and far more accessible sources than Shadwell's brutal *Libertine.* According to the British music historian Christopher Hurt, there were no less than ten operatic versions of the Don Juan story playing in Europe in the 1780s. The most popular was a short musical called *Il Convitato di Pietra* --- The Stone Guest. In the summer of 1787, the year Mozart composed his masterpiece, *Il Convitato* was playing in several cities, including Mozart's own Vienna. It was a short but well-made version of the traditional story, written by a now-forgotten playwright named Giuseppe Bertani and his musical partner, the better-known Giuseppe Gazzaniga, and it provided abundant free and accessible ideas for Mozart's favorite collaborator and drinking buddy, an Italian-born adventurer and sometime poet named Lorenzo Da Ponte.

. Da Ponte, a newcomer to Vienna, had succeeded immediately in getting himself appointed the Court Poet for Italian Opera on the strength of his skill with his native language. He met the young Mozart, who was not yet thirty and already the leading composer in Europe, and they quickly became friends and artistic collaborators. Out of their partnership came three of Mozart's most important operas: *The Marriage of Figaro* [**1786]**, *Don Giovanni* [**1787]**; and *Cosi fan tutte* [**1790].**

[**Mozart's last opera, Die Zauberflote, *The Magic Flute* (1790) has a libretto in German by Johann Metzler and Emmanuel Squanderer, who also sang the role of Papageno in the first production of Flute.]**

Da Ponte had a touch of the fakir and opportunist about him, as well as a touch of the poet, but he was a brilliant craftsman of light verse and a master of dramatic structure. He was also a genius, of sorts -- certainly not the equal of

Mozart, but a good fit, like Verdi and Boito, Strauss and Hofmannsthal, or Rogers and Hart. His original name seems to have been Emanuel Conegliano, which he took from his home town, now called Vittorio Veneto. At some point, he had converted from Judaism to Catholicism, had been sanctified as a priest and had been involved in an unpriestly scandal that forced him to leave town. Years after his association with Mozart, he emigrated to the United States and became the first professor of Italian at Columbia College in New York City – an apparently unpaid post, but the first of its kind in any American university

Da Ponte's first collaboration with Mozart, *The Marriage of Figaro*, based on a play by Pierre Beaumarchais, came under a royal ban in Vienna because it made fun of the pretensions of the aristocracy. It seemed likely that the second Mozart-DaPonte project – the story of a promiscuous aristocrat who goes to hell for refusing to repent his sins --- would similarly irritate the royalists in Vienna and would also probably be suppressed..

So the opera was offered to the National Theatre in the broad-minded and musically ravenous city of Prague, the capital of Bohemia. Like many events in Mozart's life, the stories about the first production are astonishing and possibly even true. To begin with, the first performance was badly delayed. It had been scheduled for October 14, 1787, but Mozart arrived in Prague only two weeks earlier to begin the rehearsal and final scoring. The opening was therefore postponed another two weeks to give the composer plenty of time to complete his opera.

Even for Mozart, that was a bit of a rush. He is said to have written the brilliant overture, his longest and most emotional operatic overture, on the night before the first performance. It was played unrehearsed on opening night, October 29, 1787. In the words of the critic Sir Dennis Forman, "it must have been a mess." In every other respect, however, the opera was an immense success, at least in Prague, although it later flopped in Vienna and more or less disappeared for almost a hundred years after Mozart's death.

The plot is yet another version of the now-familiar Don Juan story, part serious, part comic. There is the same series of seductions, the same infuriated

father who rushes to protect his daughter's honor and is killed in a sword fight. Don Giovanni remains the same reckless burlador who deserts and insults his former mistress, chases after new conquests, defiantly invites the statue to dinner, and is dragged off to hell before he can finish his meal. Mozart described his work as "opera giacosa" a light affair, but that was only to suggest that this was not intended to be the classic "opera seria." that Mozart aspired to write some day.

From the first notes of the famous Overture, the music suggests the underlying theme of sin and retribution.

[Music: One minute of opening bars of Overture]

Da Ponte and Mozart condensed and heightened Moliere's plot by plunging right into the action. Giovanni is off stage, assaulting his latest target, a convent girl named Donna Anna, while his servant stands by and keeps the audience up-to-date on the progress of the assignation. The servant, of course, is Moliere's ubiquitous Sganarelle, whose unsingable French name has been changed to the melodious Leporello. Once again, this hypocrite has been given some of the best lines and one of the choicest basso roles in all opera.--- the total list of Don Giovanni's conquests [**Music: The aria *Madama, il catalogo***] which he reels off to the horrified Donna Anna to discourage her from trying to reform Giovanni. .

Leporello's catalogue is funnier and more memorable than Sganarelle's stream of abuse.: (**Examples: Italy -- 640; Germany -- 231; France -- 100; Turkey -- 91; Spain -- 1003.**) Like Sganarelle, however, Leporello points out that his boss is democratically inclined. He will gladly ravish a woman of any class from aristocrat to beggar.

Mozart's music adds attributes to Giovanni's character beyond his celebrated libido. He is gracious and chivalrous, inviting his enemies to a party. His love song (*La c'i darem la mano*) to the peasant girl, Zerlina, whom he is plotting to rape, is among the most beautiful and frequently played arias in all opera. His serenade on a mandolin, although directed toward a lady's maid whom he intends to deceive, is a simple plea for romantic love.; and the slow, stately minuet played in his ballroom while he is mauling his latest object in the next

room is a mordant comment on the curiosity and veiled sexuality of the hypocritical aristocrats who have accepted invitations to a party at the palace of a notorious lecher. Mozart's music says, as none of the previous treatments of this complicated character had done, that this is a man capable of tenderness as well as violence. He is more than an animal – "a madman, a devil, a dog, a Turk." His emotions, his compulsions are common to all humanity.

By compressing the trivial, anti-climactic and repellant events of Giovanni's last days between two scenes of violence – the murder of the Commendatore and Giovanni's descent to hell---the opera achieves a dramatic tension that seems to be lacking in all the other comic and moralistic versions of the story. When the fate theme of the overture recurs in the finale, it sends a shiver through the audience and speeds the inevitable end.

'Repent!' cries the apparition of the Commandant. 'No!' says Don Giovanni. 'Repent!' 'No!'

[**Musical excerpt: The Voice of the Stone Guest]**

And Hell opens wide.

[**Note: Another instance in opera where cutting and compression improved the pace of a story is Arrigo Boito's highly praised libretto for Giuseppe Verdi's opera *Otello*. The opera is shorter, swifter, clearer and more dramatic than Shakespeare's play.]**

One might suppose that the probing of Don Juan/Giovanni by Mozart and DaPonte would have exhausted all possible interpretations of a cruel, empty-hearted philander who denigrated and was despised by the innumerable women he pretended to love But, as the commentator Harold Schonberg observes, there have always been people who are thrilled by Juan's reckless defiance of almighty judgment, people who see him as a sort of hero

As public taste shifted in the 19th Century toward large, lush operatic spectacles, Mozart and Da Ponte's sharply drawn picture of a dissolute hedonist faded from the public mind to be replaced by a vague image of a fearless adventurer with boundless energy and an insatiable appetite for life. The ugly episodes of his career were seen as "scrapes," the forgivable little mistakes of a

sexy boy in search of a good time. It became a sort of compliment, rather than an insult, to call an amorous man a Don Juan.

A major craftsman in creating a romantic new personality for old hedonist was George Gordon Byron, the most personally romantic of all Romantic poets. Three decades after first performance and later suppression of the Mozart-Da Ponte *Don Giovanni*, Byron began writing and publishing, a few cantos at a time, a massive, satirical and rather silly epic poem called *Don Juan* (or Don **Jue**-Won, in Britain) — an epic in which Byron, himself, was clearly the hero. Fearing lawsuits or maybe physical retaliation, Byron did not attach his name as author of the first cantos to be published; but everyone in Britain who read them knew by the style and content that the author could be none other than the famous Lord Byron, having fun by taking aim at rival poets, enemy politicians and various ladies who had publicly denounced him for misleading them, misusing them, and finally deserting them. Like Moliere's Don Juan, Byron's man would be a democratically inclined dispenser of sexual favors to any lucky woman waiting to receive him.

Byron's Don Juan was destined for a longer, more inventive and more exciting career as a sexual athlete than any of the earlier Dons. In the first of his anonymously published verses, Byron promised to keep the tale to a total of twelve cantos in which he would cover all of Don Juan's famous adventures on land and sea and would wind up with the hero "in the very place where wicked people go." It was obvious, however, long before the thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth cantos appeared, that Byron had no intention of keeping his promise. Nor was there any indication that this **Jue**-Won would ever be chased down and punished by a vengeful statue. Instead, he was permitted to travel, like Byron himself, to interesting places, bed down with attractive women and wear the costume of an Albanian bandit. The handsome devil kept banging away at his enemies --- and occasionally his women --- right up to the Seventeenth Canto, which Byron left unfinished in 1824 when he died of the effects of malaria in Greece, where he had gone to raise money, buy guns and

train recruits in a conspicuous display of Anglo-Saxon sympathy for the Greeks, who were rebelling against the rule of the Ottoman Turks.

One editor commented in her preface to Byron's epic: "Byron shows no particular knowledge of the Don Juan story as treated by earlier poets, and the subject was manifestly a mere pretext…for writing indiscriminately on whatever came into his mind."

The poem begins in a pseudo-epic style, more suitable for comedy than tragedy. The poet sees a shortage of heroes in current English poetry:.

I'll therefore take our ancient friend Don Juan –

We have all seen him, in the pantomime,

Sent to the devil somewhat ere his time.

Byron's Don Juan is born in Seville, one of his few similarities to Tirso's man.

[**Moliere, for mysterious reasons – perhaps political caution -- moved Don Juan from Spain to Sicily, while DaPonte and Mozart brought him back to Spain to avoid offending the Hapsburgs, who were the ruling family in Sicily. Go figure.]**

Young Jew-Won is a spoiled, selfish, "curly-headed, good-for-nothing, and mischief-making monkey from his birth." His mother and father, who are absorbed in their own extramarital love affairs, raise him to learn

"The arts of riding, fencing, gunnery

"And how to scale a fortress or a nunnery."

At sixteen "tall, handsome, slender but well knit," Juan is attracted to a married woman, seven or eight years older than he. His target, Julia, struggles with temptation, whispering to herself, "I will never consent," and then, of course, consents. After several months of this affair, Julia's husband, Don Alfonso, bursts into her bedroom one night, bringing along a string of lawyers and sword-swingers, looking for Juan, who hides under the bedclothes in the finest tradition of European farce. Naughty Julia scolds her husband for suspecting her of infidelity, sends the poor cuckold on his way, and pops back into bed with Juan.

When the husband comes back a few stanzas later to apologize, he spots a pair of men's shoes under the bed. Young Juan is forced to flee naked into the streets of Seville, where the neighbors must have been getting sick and tired of this sort of behavior. Juan is shipped; Julia enters a convent, where she writes verses telling Don Juan she loves him still:

Man's love is of a man's life a thing apart
T'is woman's whole existence; man may range
The court, camp, church, the vessel and the mart…
Men have all these resources, we but one
To love again, and be again undone…

[**This observation is one of the few places in which Byron's Juan sounds like Moliere's.**]

So much for the possessive, unforgiving attitude of such recipients of Don Juan's passing love as Donna Elvira, Donna Anna, Zerlina and Moliere's polygamous peasant girls, all of whom appeared to nurse a grudge.

In the second Canto, the curly-headed, mischief-making monkey survives a wreck at sea and countless days in a life boat by eating his father's spaniel dog and also, eventually, his father. Sighting a distant shore, Juan plunges into the water, where, like Byron, he proves to be a heroic swimmer.

A better swimmer you could scarce see ever,
He could perhaps, have passed the Hellespont,
At once a feat on which ourselves we prided
Leander, Mr. Ekenhead, and I did.

Thus do mysterious foreign bodies enter the orbit of Don Juan. The reference here is to an otherwise obscure and forgotten officer of His Majesty's Royal Marines, Lieutenant William Ekenhead, who joined Byron in May, 1810, in swimming across the straits of the Dardanelles. A few months after that challenging day, Ekenhead, wandering home during a drunken evening, fell to his death from a fortress in Malta. His mention in Canto Two, line 105, of Byron's epic is his only known poetic epitaph. Byron's swim, however, appears in all of the poet's many biographies.

As for Byron's water-soaked alter ego, Don Juan, he is washed up half dead on a Greek island, where he is rescued by a beautiful girl named Haidee, who lives with Zoe, an older companion, in a conveniently located cave. It is almost needless to say --- as Byron says of Haidee--- that -----:

Her brow was white and low, her cheeks pure dye
Like twilight rosy still with the set sun

The two women put Juan to bed in their cave after stealing a brief, admiring look at his naked body, and promise to return with a proper English breakfast of eggs, fish, bread, and coffee. Haidee falls for the unclothed stranger, of course -- what else can you do on a deserted island in the Aegean? Besides, as Byron says:

He was a very pretty fellow
Although his woes had turned him slightly yellow
But Juan's off-color complexion does not offend Haidee.
They look upon each other, and their eyes
Gleam in the moonlight; and her white arm clasps
Round Juan's head, and his around her head
Half buried in the tresses which it grasps.
She sits upon his knee, and drinks his sighs,
He hers, until they end in broken gasps;
And thus they form a group that's quite antique,
Half naked, loving, natural, and Greek

At this odd place, Byron has much to say about the problem of disloyalty in women and sometimes in men. This digression triggers a reminder of his love for Greece, which he illustrates with one of his best-known verses:

The Isles of Greece, the Isles of Greece
Where burning Sappho loved and sung
Where grew the arts of war and peace,

Where Delos rose, and Phoebus sprung!

Eternal summer gilds them yet,

But all except their sun is set.

In the next canto, Haidee's father, Lambros, returns from an overseas piracy job and figures out what's been going on during his absence. His quick cure for Haidee's infatuation to hand Juan back the pirates, from whose clutches he escapes into the service of Catherine the Great and thence into the great world of fabulous adventure. Along the way, Byron unburdens himself of many long, disconnected hymns to liberty and revolution and many frothing rants against such enemies as the Tory party in the House of Lords, the rival poets Coleridge and Wordsworth, and so on..

By this point, the exhausted reader must realize that Byron's Don Juan will never let a dinner invitation from a menacing statue interfere with his travels and will probably never feel the fires of hell.. His claim to bear the name Don Juan is as feeble as the claim of Johnny Depp and as transitory as the literary fame of Byron's ill-fated swimming partner Lieutenant William Ekenhead.

Still, Byron's Romantic view of Don Juan appealed to the Romantic imagination of the early 19th Century, and for nigh on to two hundred years people who haven't read it have been saying it is Byron's greatest poem, or certainly his longest, and the part about the isles of Greece the easiest to memorize. .

Meanwhile, translations of Moliere's play have carried the unsentimental, morally repugnant story of Juan Tenorio around the world. E(rnst) T(heodore) Hoffmann's novella *Don Juan* [**1813**} remained popular for many years in Germany, although it was included among the stories set to music in Jacques Offenbach's opera *Tales of Hoffmann*. Another German, Christian Dietrich Grabbe, wrote a play that paired Don Juan with Faust. The, too, there is Charles Baudelaire's beautiful segment in "The Flowers of Evil," [***Don Juan aux enfers,* 1861**] which picture Juan gliding into hell in a small boat with the stone statue at the helm.

[**He leans on his sword, impassive and alone, looking back at the wake of the boat, ignoring the laughter, curses and pleading of those whom he has wronged.]**

The Russian symbolist Alksandr Blok saw Don Juan facing death as the stone statue approached.. [***Shagi Komandora* 1910]** And, in Spanish-speaking countries, Jose Zorilla's *Don Juan Tenerio* [**Played first in 1844 and almost yearly thereafter]** emphasized the moral message by bringing back the ghost of his most forgiving victim, Dona Ines, who joins Juan and the statue at dinner just in time to accept Juan's last minute repentance and to lead him directly to heaven..

At this point, reeling from excess, we encounter the last and most peculiar literary reincarnation of Juan Tenorio. This time, he has transmogrified into an intellectually arrogant young Englishman named Jack Tanner, whose initials, J.T. are about his only similarity to his ancestor of the Tenorio clan. Tanner's attitude toward sex is precisely opposite to that of the burlador of Seville. In Tanner's opinion:: "It is a woman's business to get married as soon as possible, and a man's to keep unmarried as long as he can."

Tanner sees marriage as a system created by women to trap unwilling men into mating simply to assure the procreation of the species. He warns a young friend who is eager to marry his sweetheart:

. "Her purpose is neither her happiness nor yours, but Nature's. Vitality in a woman is a blind fury of creation. She sacrifices herself to it; do you think she will hesitate to sacrifice you?"

Women, in short, are like black widow spiders – mating, then killing and devouring their mates for the nourishment of the young.

This unlikely Don Juan, is the upside down and backward creation of the Irish philosopher George Bernard Shaw, who uses Tanner as a robotic mouthpiece for a flood of ideas on man, woman, society and sexuality extracted from Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Darwin, Spencer, Anarchism, Fabian Socialism, Wagner, Dickens, Cervantes – and, of course, Himself, George Bernard Shaw.

Tanner is the leading voice in *Man and Superman*, a very long, very wordy, very un-sexy play that Shaw wrote at the suggestion of a friend who challenged him to bring a new perspective to the character. In this, the longest of his many long prefaces, Shaw wrote: "First, I have had to ask myself, what is a Don Juan? Vulgarly, a libertine… [But] philosophically, Don Juan is a man who, though gifted enough to be exceptionally capable of distinguishing between good and evil, follows his own instincts without regard to the common, statute or canon law; and therefore, whilst gaining the ardent sympathy of our rebellious instincts…finds himself in mortal conflict with existing institutions…"

. *Man and Superman* is sometimes described as Shaw's greatest play, primarily by those people who have never sat through a performance in its entirety or who judge a play by its intellectual content rather than its dramatic force. In structure, it is a three act drawing room comedy that might have come from Oscar Wilde – a lot of lying, misunderstandings, confused identities, hurt feelings and disagreements, leading to the usual, foreseeable sorting out and coupling of the various characters. Sandwiched between the second and third acts comes an hour-and-a-half debate among three characters from Moliere --- Dona Ana, Don Juan and The Statue – and one character whose presence is usually felt not seen, The Devil The debate is sometimes produced as a stand-alone dramatic reading called *Don Juan in Hell*, with the actors seated side-by-side at a long table like participants in a panel discussion. Some years ago, a highly successful production of this intractable material brought together Charles Boyer as Don Juan; Charles Laughton as The Devil; Cedric Hardwick as The Statue and Agnes Moorhead as poor old mistreated Dona Ana.

Most of their discussion involves the creative theories of Jack Tanner, who is supposed to be dreaming all this stuff while he is a captive of bandits in southern Spain. (Don't bother trying to follow this.) Tanner thinks mankind can evolve into intellectual supermen, while the other characters try and shoot holes in his theories. In the end of the debate – as in the drawing room comedy --- it is the woman, Dona Ana, having been allowed scarcely a word in the male-dominated conversation, who emerges triumphant as the receptacle of the necessity matrix

for the Superman – the Life Force of biological procreation. While Ann, her counterpart in the modern play, closes in on Jack Tanner, Dona Ana in the dream sequence goes after Don Juan to make him the father of Superman.

In *Man and Superman,* Don Juan is the victim, not the villain. He is not dragged off to hell; he is dragged off to the altar.

[The first, somewhat experimental production of the play was at the Court Theatre in London in 1905. A later production, which was haled as a modern classic took place at the Criterion Theatre, a small, 600-seat house on Piccadilly Circus n 1911.]

What is it about the character of Don Juan, this amoral, egotistical, cynical, hedonistic anti-hero, that continues to fascinate generations of writers, poets and composers,? In a study of literally hundreds of versions of the story that appeared in musical or non-musical versions before Mozart, Professor Charles C. Russell of the University of Maryland offers this view:

"Don Juan lives in us all. He is our daydream of adventure, he is our nighttime dream of escape; he is the sexual act of conquest or of submission that we have all longed for; he is the act of daring we have never attempted and the fulfillment of successes we have never achieved; he is the irresponsibility, indifference, egotism, all the unlawful things we have put aside because unattainable in a world with real spouses, real neighbors, real police and real ministers. He is our ego asserting itself in its most elemental; and selfish fashion."

[**The Don Juan Legend Before Mozart; University of Michigan Press, l993]**

This, apparently, remains the most widely accepted view of Don Juan's attraction. However, Sir Dennis Forman, in an informal commentary on Mozart's opera, argues that, while millions of words have been expended trying to pin down the true nature of Don Giovanni: "This is not possible, for

Giovanni is no more a real man than Tarzan, James Bond, or even the great god Zeus (who certainly shared some of [Giovanni's] tastes….He did, of course, have human characteristics, quite a bit of Douglas Fairbanks senior, something of Casanova (but better looking), a whiff of the Marquis de Sade, but in the end he is a manufactured man, a stereotype, Mr Supersex, who wanders through life dong one thing only and doing it pretty often. This is not to say that Mozart and da Ponte do not invest him with a lot of life, but even they cannot make this peripatetic bounder add up to a complete human being. From his music we learn that he can be seductive, coarse, arrogant and brave,. But there is no musical core to Giovanni. If, after the opera, you were to shout down to hell 'Stand up the real Don Giovanni' at least three people would rise, not just one."

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Further Comments by author:

[**If, as in some adaptations, Don Juan is spared his punishment, the moral fiber of the story disintegrates. Byron never dealt with the question. Shaw condemned his Don Juan only to be reduced to bourgeois respectability, marriage, and intellectual domination by a clever women. Patrick Marber condemns his Soho Don to suffer the gruesome but suitable fate of being stabbed in the groin and beaten to death by Elvira's brothers..**

The zarzuela based on Zorilla's *Don Juan Tenorio,* has a happy ending, of sorts. The stone statue, who strongly resembles a priest in white robes, drags Juan toward the pit of hell while smoke and flames pour from the basement and church bells toll incessantly. Just then, Juan's most forgiving victim, Dona Ines, appears at the edge of the pit, dressed as a nun, and offers a helping hand. Juan gives in and rolls his eyeballs toward heaven like an El Greco saint. The bells toll madly. Having repented at last, the

naughty fellow is presumably saved from eternal damnation – or, at least, will be allowed to work off some time in Purgatory before rising to Heaven to rejoin the father-in-law he skewered and the innumerable virgins he deflowered.]