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From Villain to Hero: Don Juan Through the Ages

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From Villain to Hero, Don Juan Through the Ages

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Languages and Literature of Bard College

by
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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Dedication

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To Mom and Dad, for everything.

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“Fire, oh fire, and water, water!
Have pity, love, don’t scorch my spirits!
Oh, wicked cabin, scene of slaughter,
Where honour, vanquished in a fight,
Bled crimson! Vilest robber’s den
And shelter of the wrongs I mourn!
O traitor guest, most curst of men,
To leave a girl, betrayed, forlorn!”

— *The Trickster of Seville*, Tirso de Molina

“La constance n'est bonne que pour des ridicules ; toutes les belles ont droit de nous charmer, et l'avantage d'être rencontrée la première ne doit point dérober aux autres les justes prétentions qu'elles ont toutes sur nos cours. Pour moi, la beauté me ravit partout où je la trouve, et je cède facilement à cette douce violence dont elle nous entraîne.”¹

— *Dom Juan ou le Festin de pierre*, Molière

“Aimer
C’est plus fort que l’envie de vivre
Plus fort que l’envie d’être libre
Plus fort que l’alcool qui m’enivre
Oh, je l’aime, j’ai son nom gravé
Sur ma peau
Je l’aime, je l’aime...”²

— *Don Juan*, Félix Gray

¹ “Constancy is only suitable for buffoons: all beautiful women have the right to charm us, and the advantage of being seen first should not steal from the others the just claims they have on our hearts. I let beauty ravish me wherever I find it and yield easily to its sweet violence and to the places it leads us.” (All excerpts from the play are taken from the translation on *Dom Juan ou le Festin de pierre*, Molière, Translated by Brett B. Bodemer 2010)

² “To love Is stronger than the will for life Stronger than the desire for freedom Stronger than the alcohol which intoxicates me Oh, I love her, her name is carved Into my skin, I love her, I love her...” –*L’amour quand il vient* (All excerpts from the musical are taken from the translation on website <https://lyricstranslate.com/en/aimer-love.html-1>)

Introduction

Don Juan, also known as Don Giovanni, is a fictional Spanish libertine who is known as a legendary “serial seducer”³. This infamous character has inspired artists who created different forms of works: Molière's play, Byron's poem, Mozart's opera, Richard Strauss's tone poem, and so on.

Don Juan exhibits two coexisting traits. The first is that of a dissolute *roué* who is shameless and goes after all women; he is notorious for his misdeeds, leaving behind the heart broken mistress and their angry husbands. The second trait is that of an Enlightenment hero, a symbol of independent thinking and action standing in opposition to church and convention.

In this project, I shall discuss how people's perspective towards the figure of Don Juan changes through time by examining three major dramatic works: Molière's *Dom Juan ou le Festin de pierre* (1665), Mozart's *Don Giovanni* (1787) and Félix Gray's *Don Juan* (2003), a modern “comédie musicale” based on this legend.

Don Juan has almost gone through four hundred years of history. His story can be traced back to the early 17th century. According to Ann Livermore, this problematic character was first given literary personality in the tragic drama *El burlador de Sevilla* (The Trickster of Seville, 1630) by the Spanish dramatist Tirso de Molina.⁴

³ Term created by the intelligent Bard French professor Eric Trudel

⁴ *The Origins of Don Juan*, Ann Livermore, *Music and Letters*, Volume 44, Issue 3, July 1963, Pages 257–265, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ml/44.3.257>

Molière's play *Dom Juan* appeared in 1665. It was only thirty-five years after Tirso de Molina's, but the play seemed to inhabit a different world: Ruth Plaut Weinreb pointed out that "tricks" in the title *El burlador de Sevilla* already announces a society full of hypocrisy and deceit.⁵ On the contrary, under Molière's pen Don Juan is true to himself: he says that "tout le plaisir de l'amour est dans le changement."⁶ He accepts the fact that love is brief and he takes pleasure in this fact, believing that he cannot be responsible for others if they do not share the same opinion that he does. Besides this, Don Juan is in Molière's play by no means a man devoid of morals or a demonic force of nature. When he and his servant Sganarelle hide in disguise in a forest, Don Juan rescues a nobleman (Don Carlos) from robbers.

One hundred years after Molière brought Don Juan's story onto the stage, the famous opera, Mozart's *Don Giovanni* was created. In the Opera, Mozart did not portray Don Giovanni as an entirely negative character either; Don Giovanni is presented as a cheerful, free spirited, and charming person through very beautiful melodies. According to John Kerns, he stands up against the church, against convention, against rigid social class, and against the idea that we should suffer here on Earth to earn a reward in Heaven. The thrilling final scene, in which Don Giovanni shows tremendous courage by standing firm in his beliefs and refusing to submit, is an emblem of heroism.⁷

The heroic elements given to Don Juan have gradually transformed him from a single, repulsive negative character to a fuller and more acceptable protagonist. Through hundreds of

⁵ In Defense of Don Juan: Deceit and Hypocrisy in Tirso de Molina, Molière, Mozart and G.B. Shaw, Weinreb, Ruth Plaut, p426

⁶ all the pleasure of love subsists in change

⁷ John Kerns, *Mozart's Don Giovanni: An Enlightenment Hero?*
<https://www.atlassociety.org/post/mozarts-don-giovanni-an-enlightenment-hero>

years, the story of Don Juan gradually began to break away from the original legends. He is no longer just a despised libertine but has become a more charming and controversial character.

However, the shift of being shown as a villain to a hero has brought problems. In my music history class, I read articles that propose the cancellation of Mozart operas or presenting these living works in politically correct ways (for instance, cast a female actress as Don Juan in Molière’s play). Some scholars are concerned that the moral ambiguity surrounding Don Giovanni will mislead some youth into a wrong direction — enlightening his heroism and trying to hide his dark side. Cassandra L. Hartford argues that it becomes the most problematic when well-meaning authors and editors use euphemisms that obscure the opera's content while they translate.⁸ For instance, in the opening scene of *Don Giovanni*, while Don Giovanni and Donna Anna are arguing, Leporello said:

“Bravo! Due imprese leggiadre!

Sforzar la figlia, ed ammazzar il padre!” , some production translates this as

“Well done! Two misdeeds!⁹

First you raped the daughter then murdered the father!” while another does

“Well done, the intention was pretty,

Seduce the daughter, and then dispatch the father!”¹⁰

⁸ Sexual Violence in Opera: Scholarship, Pedagogy, and Production as Resistance, Suzanne G. Cusick, Monica A. Hershberger, Richard Will, Micaela Baranello, Bonnie Gordon, Ellie M. Hisama *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, Vol. 71, No. 1 (SPRING 2018), pp. 213-253

⁹Translations are from this website https://www.murashev.com/opera/Don_Giovanni_libretto_Italian_English

¹⁰Translations are from this website <https://opera-guide.ch/operas/don+giovanni/libretto/en/>

Hartford claims that what happens to Donna Anna is not being abandoned by a callous lover who seduces women: it is an attempted rape (this scene will be analyzed in the Mozart chapter later to push against Hartford's perspective). Liane Curtis also points out the problem caused by different standard from different time: "College-level music textbooks have avoided problematizing the rape and sexual violence that takes place in Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni*. Instead these books have followed a romantic tradition of heroizing the leading character as a rugged individual and marginalizing the women characters".¹¹

Is *Don Giovanni* a hero, a murderer, or a rapist? With what attitude should we face this character? Author John Kerns says that:

One need not answer these questions to enjoy *Don Giovanni*. Opera is about entertainment and enjoyment. A perfectly wonderful evening can be had at the opera by simply giving oneself to the drama, the music, and the spectacle. At the same time, opera can be about ideas. These ideas can deepen the meaning of an opera and enrich our encounter with it, while thinking about an opera's characters can enrich the moral universe from which we draw our ethical beliefs.¹²

As a musician myself, I feel that it is a responsibility to engage meaningfully with such criticism while also endeavoring to protect the musical treasures that we have inherited.

¹¹ Liane Curtis, *The Sexual Politics of Teaching Mozart's Don Giovanni*, NWSA Journal, Volume 12, Number 1, Spring 2000, pp. 119-142 (Article), Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

¹² <https://www.atlassociety.org/post/mozarts-don-giovanni-an-enlightenment-hero>

The same impulse to negate the more troubling and unpalatable aspects of the character – if not the entire opera devoted to him – is found in the 2003 comédie musical created by Félix Gray. Gray tries to diminish the dark side of Don Juan considerably — no sexual violence is shown at all at the beginning or through out the musical, and Don Juan’s initial appearance is as a person whose sensitive side has been revealed. He experiences love. Here is how the musical is described: “Le voilà condamné à l'amour, amour qui signera sa chute. Cette passion nouvelle et sincère naîtra avec Maria, sculptrice ingénue promise à un autre...”¹³. Don Juan’s moral side is made prominent, he is not Don Juan any more. The musical becomes a romantic love story.

Don Juan, this extremely controversial character has been repurposed throughout history. It is apparent that the latest adaptation, Félix Gray decided to reduce the controversy, and he made Don Juan a standard “hero” who fits the morals of our society.

However, once Don Juan is forced to lose his dark traits (as I mentioned in the beginning) to fit the “ethical belief” created by our society, are we losing the soul of this character?

¹³ Here he is condemned to love, which marks his fall. This new and sincere passion will be born with Maria (the girl he falls in love with in the show, an ingenue sculptor promised to another (translation?)... (source unfound...))

An Ambiguous Hero as well as a Philosopher:

Molière's *Dom Juan ou le Festin de Pierre*

Molière's *Dom Juan* premiered in Paris on February 15th, 1665, which is only 35 years after Tirso's *Burlador*. As mentioned in the introduction, the figure has already been interpreted differently compared to the *Burlador*. In the book *The Metamorphoses of Don Juan*, Leo Weinstein defines the *Burlador* as "a giant who stands with one foot in the Middle Ages which accept miraculous events unquestioningly, and with the other at the edge of the modern world which begins to rebel against the restrictions imposed by religious authority" while "Molière's *Dom Juan*, by contrast, is a thoroughly modern hero, highly refined, highly sophisticated, a past master in psychological subtleties"¹⁴. Even though I am not ready to endorse Weinstein's claim that *Don Juan* is a thorough hero, it's undeniable that *Don Juan* is given heroic characteristics by Molière.

The play contains thirty-nine scenes in five acts. Molière did not follow the "classical unities" of time, place, and event (a prescriptive theory of dramatic tragedy in 17th century France). The story lasts at least three days. The five acts of the play take place in the following locations: a palace, the countryside, a forest, the apartment of *Don Juan*, and a field. The plot revolves around the numerous conflicts between *Don Juan* and the people he encounters as he constantly pursues women.

¹⁴ *The Metamorphoses of Don Juan*, Leo Weinstein, Stanford University Press, 1959, p27

According to scholar Jiuming Liu, although “the figure is originally from Spain, under Molière’s pen Don Juan becomes a typical example of the aristocrats of 17th century France”¹⁵. The play contains lots of self analysis of Don Juan when he gives “speeches”. Don Juan and his servant Sganarelle wander in the countryside, and Don Juan focuses on his seductive business with women. The play begins with a conversation between Sganarelle and Elvire's servant Gusman. We learn that Don Juan has abducted Elvire and promises to marry her. However, after deceiving Elvire, he quickly loses interest in her. Gusman can't understand how Don Juan can betray his words after such effusions of love. Here is one example of Don Juan’s “philosophical speeches”¹⁶ to excuse himself of manipulating women:

Les inclinations naissantes, après tout, ont des charmes inexplicables, et tout le plaisir de l'amour est dans le changement. On goûte une douceur extrême à réduire, par cent hommages, le coeur d'une jeune beauté, à voir de jour en jour les petits progrès qu'on y fait, à combattre par des transports, par des larmes et des soupirs, l'innocente pudeur d'une âme qui a peine à rendre les armes, à forcer pied à pied toutes les petites résistances qu'elle nous oppose, à vaincre les scrupules dont elle se fait un honneur et la mener doucement où nous avons envie de la faire venir. Mais lorsqu'on en est maître une fois, il n'y a plus rien à dire ni rien à souhaiter ; tout le beau de la passion est fini, et nous nous endormons dans la

¹⁵ https://wenku.baidu.com/view/7f776c302aea81c758f5f61fb7360b4c2f3f2a88.html?_wkts_=1711407394819&bdQuery=莫里哀+唐璜+论文&needWelcomeRecommand=1

¹⁶ Weinstein uses “philosophical” to describe Don Juan’s speeches, therefore I use the term “philosophical speeches”

tranquillité d'un tel amour, si quelque objet nouveau ne vient réveiller nos désirs, et présenter à notre coeur les charmes attrayants d'une conquête à faire.¹⁷



Costume design for "Don Juan" Moliere (1622-73)¹⁸

¹⁷ After all, the first stirrings of love are charged with inexplicable charms, and all the pleasure of love subsists in change. We taste an extreme sweetness in reducing, by a hundred tributes, the heart of a young beauty, to see from day to day the little progress that one makes there; to combat with transports, tears and sighs, the innocent shame of a soul to the point of rendering up its arms; to force, at close quarters, all the small resistances she puts up; to vanquish the scruples of which she makes an honor and to lead her softly to the place where we wish to make her come. But let us be master once, nothing more is left to say or to wish; the beautiful part of passion is done, and we would sink into the tranquility of such a love, if some new object did not come to awaken our desires, and present to our heart the alluring charms of another conquest. p9

¹⁸ French School (15th century) Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal

Then Don Juan seduces the peasant-girl Charlotte with sweet words and at the same time he proposes to marry Mathurine. Elvire's brother comes to seek revenge on Don Juan. Don Juan quickly flees with Sganarelle. On the way, he encounters a beggar. Don Juan agrees to give him money but asks him to insult God; the beggar refuses. Later on they encounter a group of robbers and Don Juan rescues a gentleman. When passing by the tomb of the commander who was killed by Don Juan, Don Juan defiantly proposes to have dinner with the statue. Even though Sganarelle tries to stop him from doing this, he insists on ordering Sganarelle to invite the statue to dinner, the stone statue nods his head. However, Don Juan doesn't believe what Sganarelle sees when Sganarelle tells him about the gesture made by the statue. And he tries to leave at once after seeing the movement which shows his arrogance and relative bravery. After getting home, Don Juan has to deal with the merchant Monsieur Dimanche, who is his creditor. He has no money to pay his debt so he sends him away with insincere formalities. Then Don Louis, Don Juan's father appears and sternly rebukes him for his reckless behavior. However, the son shows no concern and remains arrogant and impolite in front of his father. Also Elvire begs Don Juan for the last time to repent. Don Juan tells his father that he has decided to start anew. As soon as his father leaves, he openly tells the servant who seems shocked that he is just acting in front of his father. In the final scene the specter of a veiled woman appears and warns Don Juan that this is his last chance to repent, but Don Juan refuses again. The statue of the Commander enters and asks Don Juan to give him his hand. Don Juan is then knocked down by lightning and subsequently beaten to hell. All that remains on stage is the servant shouting for his unpaid salary.

Don Juan only obeys his inner desires and acts according to his own standards of

happiness: “Il n'est rien qui puisse arrêter l'impétuosité de mes désirs,”¹⁹ he claims, so he never restricts his behavior. His servant, Sganarelle, comments on him in this way:

Don Juan, mon maître, le plus grand scélérat que la terre ait jamais porté, un enragé, un chien, un diable, un Turc, un hérétique, qui ne croit ni Ciel, ni Enfer, ni loup-garou, qui passe cette vie en véritable bête brute, un pourceau d'Épicure, un vrai Sardanapale, qui ferme l'oreille à toutes les remontrances [chrétiennes] qu'on lui peut faire, et traite de billevesées tout ce que nous croyons.²⁰

It is interesting that Sganarelle is calling Don Juan a “brute beast”, since we know that animals only obey their desires. In the book *Mozart's Don Giovanni and the Invitation to Full Freedom*, Thomas G. Casey says that “The freedom that Don Giovanni wants to retain at all costs is merely freedom as the absence of physical constraint”²¹, which does sound like he cannot control himself. But Molière has given Don Juan so many philosophical thoughts to distinguish his character as a human being who uses freedom to manipulate others. As mentioned by David Ball and Frank H. Ellis: “His drive for total freedom manifests itself on stage through one of the freest of human activities, that of play.”²² Therefore, it seems there are different drives towards Don Juan’s motivation of pursuing women. No matter what the reason is behind his behavior, Don Juan does not have any shame towards his inappropriate relationship with women, he

¹⁹ There is nothing that can stop the impetuosity of my desires

²⁰ Don Juan, my master, the greatest renegade that the earth has ever endured, a wild man, a dog, a devil, a Turk, a heretic, who does not believe in Heaven, Hell, or the Wolf-man, who disports in this life as a thoroughly brute beast, a pig of Epicurus, a true Sardanapalus, who closes his ears to all Christian remonstrances that one could make to him, and treats all that we believe as empty words.” “There is nothing that can halt the impetuosity of my desires p6

²¹ *Mozart's Don Giovanni and the Invitation to Full Freedom*, Thomas G. Casey, New Blackfriars, Vol. 88, No. 1015 (MAY 2007) p288

²² *Moliere's Dom Juan: Form, Meaning, Audience*, David Ball and Frank H. Ellis, Vol. 81, No. 2 (Nov., 1983), pp. 146-158, p147

regards his selfishness as being “truthful”. His fiancée Donna Elvire asks him why he doesn’t keep his promise, which does not arouse any guilt or reflection from him. Don Juan only wants to indulge and enjoy his life: “N'allons point songer au mal qui nous peut arriver, et songeons seulement à ce qui nous peut donner du plaisir.”²³

Although Don Juan’s speeches portray a selfish figure, Molière

modernized the hero and opened up completely new possibilities by concentrating on the psychological study of the seducer and his situation in society, he endowed Don Juan with the intellect which made a more complex character possible, and he de-emphasized the religious problem, which, outside Spain, would have aroused relatively little interest in theater audiences and would probably have met with disapproval from religious authorities in France.

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Thus Don Juan becomes a thinker with heroic elements added. It also explains Jiuming’s point that Don Juan was a popular theme at that time, and Molière wrote the work to improve the financial situation of the theater. He had to consider what the audience was willing to accept and follow the ethical beliefs of the society at that time. Don Juan’s hypocrisy in the last scene is full of irony. Sganarelle, Don Louis, and Elvire's attempts do not make Don Juan repent. Instead, under the social pressure, “What Don Juan is actually doing when he adopts hypocrisy as his new creed is affirming his essence once again, in the only way left open to him. By remaining lucidly himself he remains free, not only in action, outwardly "Je ne quitterai point mes douces

²³ Stop thinking about all the bad things that might happen; let’s think only about what can give us pleasure p12

²⁴ *The Metamorphoses of Don Juan*, Leo Weinstein, Stanford University Press, 1959, p34

habitudes" (5.1) but also inwardly as a truly free man: "Non, non, je ne suis point changé, et mes sentiments sont toujours les mêmes." A rationalist libertine has been turned into an amoral religious hypocrite.²⁵ These extremely ideological connotations deemphasize the immoral side of Don Juan, here is his speech on hypocrisy:

L'hypocrisie est un vice à la mode, et tous les vices à la mode passent pour vertus. Le personnage d'homme de bien est le meilleur de tous les personnages qu'on puisse jouer aujourd'hui, et la profession d'hypocrite a de merveilleux avantages. C'est un art de qui l'imposture est toujours respectée ; et quoiqu'on la découvre, on n'ose rien dire contre elle. Tous les autres vices des hommes sont exposés à la censure, et chacun a la liberté de les attaquer hautement ; mais l'hypocrisie est un vice privilégié, qui, de sa main, ferme la bouche à tout le monde, et jouit en repos d'une impunité souveraine.²⁶

This rich and powerful nobleman praises hypocrisy as a useful social mask and uses his status to humiliate and abuse people around him: “he plays openly with Done Elvire, agilely with the peasant girls, brilliantly with Monsieur Dimanche; he is constantly playing cat and mouse with Sganarelle. Metaphorically speaking, he ends up playing the role of hypocrite, which has become the only way he can still more metaphorically play not only with women but with all of society.”²⁷

²⁵ *Moliere's Dom Juan: Form, Meaning, Audience* by David Ball and Frank H. Ellis, The University of Chicago Press, p153-154

²⁶ hypocrisy is a fashionable vice, and all fashionable vices pass for virtues. A pious man is the best of all roles that one can play today, for the hypocritical profession has marvelous advantages. It is an art whose imposture is always respected: and even if the imposture is discovered, one dares say nothing against it. All other vices are prone to censure, and everyone has the liberty to attack them in a high tone; but hypocrisy is a privileged vice, which, with its finger, closes the mouth of everyone, and plays its game in peace with a sovereign impunity. p74

²⁷ *Moliere's Dom Juan: Form, Meaning, Audience* by David Ball and Frank H. Ellis, The University of Chicago Press, p148

Even carefully considering the level of acceptance from the society, *Dom Juan* still incurred problems for Molière. An article that *Illustre-stage* posts says: “because of its disturbing subject Molière was forced to edit some scenes out after only two performances. Eventually, after only fifteen performances he had to pull the play from the stage in order to avoid the wrath of his opponents.”²⁸ Molière thinks that the function of comedy is "to correct men's vices" and "to correct men by amusing them, I believed that in my occupation I could nothing better than attack the vices of my age by making them ridiculous"²⁹ Molière is careful not to make Don Juan’s behavior simply ridiculous but rather excessive. Molière’s enemies (people from the court who are offended by his works) attack his play while ignoring others that deal with religion because Molière attacks religious hypocrisy directly and not only false piety.

Molière provoked many thoughts to make Don Juan step away from the classic villain impression and move toward a “hero”. But like Weinstein says, “but what of Don Juan? His name has become a household word. Everybody is talking about him, but nobody can be quite sure of what he is talking about.”³⁰ The figure has been depicted so differently, not only the character, but also the form of the work. The next chapter will focus on Mozart’s Don Giovanni, which is an opera. The added new elements, music makes this attractive character even more interesting and complicated.

²⁸ <https://sites.austincc.edu/illustre-stage/moliere-and-dom-juan/>

²⁹ Molière quoted on website <https://www.dbu.edu/mitchell/early-modern-resources/molierep.html>

³⁰ *The Metamorphoses of Don Juan*, Leo Weinstein, Stanford University Press, p2

An Enlightenment Hero Who Pursues Freedom:

Mozart's *Don Giovanni*

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Don Giovanni is described as an antagonist, a fickle aristocrat lacking principles. Molière makes the figure more charming by portraying a philosophical thinker. But in Mozart's opera, the image of Don Giovanni goes beyond human morality and cannot be judged by analyzing the figure himself because of the new element which Molière's play does not have: music. Musicologist Roger Kamien says "Mozart's music has made a sinner seem very attractive"³¹. Since the music is so well written, the dark side of the figure draws less attention because of the invitation made to the audience to like him. Author John Kerns points out how music affects the character:

It is obvious that Mozart wants us to like and enjoy the Don. He is shown as strong, confident, happy, free of superstition, and his own man. And of course, the Don gets great music. Mozart provides Don Giovanni with an aria that explicitly embraces his philosophy of enjoying life: the famous champagne aria, "Finch' han dal vino." Here the music is quick, lively, and celebratory.³²

³¹ *The Sexual Politics of Teaching Mozart's "Don Giovanni"*, Liane Curtis, NWSA Journal, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Spring, 2000), p121

³² John Kerns, *Mozart's Don Giovanni: An Enlightenment Hero?*
<https://www.atlassociety.org/post/mozarts-don-giovanni-an-enlightenment-hero>



Max Slevogt, The Singer Francisco D'Andrade as Don Giovanni in Mozart's Opera (1912), Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin

Thus the accurate emotions towards Don Giovanni that Mozart brings to the audience is a mix of love and hate because of this controversy. Considering Don Giovanni's relationship with women and the sheer quantity (which is 640 women and girls in Italy, 231 in Germany, 100 in France, 91 in Turkey, but in Spain, 1,003 as Leporello tells us in the aria *Madamina, il catalogo è questo*) that he has, his love life seems full of absurdity and chaos. However, Mozart and the librettist Da Ponte injects full vitality into this character with music and gives the audience a sense that Don Giovanni is heroic by making him “stand on the side of the new Enlightenment

ideals of reason and the individual and against rank, convention, superstition, and church”.³³ Later on, Byron would compliment him as a “romantic hero”, but even earlier, Molière had already made him “a garrulous rationalist forever engaging in philosophical dispute”³⁴.

There have always been arguments about whether Don Giovanni is a “hero” or not. Mozart obviously endowed Don Giovanni with serious and noble qualities. In the opera, Don Giovanni possesses the Caballero (which is a Spanish gentleman) temperament. He is well-mannered and acts politely, but we cannot tell if one is heroic by just looking at his actions. What characteristics does a hero need? The question is asked by Canadian–American psychotherapist and writer Nathaniel Branden who presented on heroism in a lecture at The Atlas Society’s 2002 Summer Seminar. He claimed that each hero was persecuted by the mediocrities of his time who could not understand his work and felt threatened by it. Despite this, each persevered against enormous odds. An article Branden contributed to the Atlas Society answers that

This description fits Don Giovanni well. He is a genius at his particular calling, radically unconventional, independent, and embattled. In particular, Don Giovanni's steadfast courage and refusal to abandon his beliefs are the center of the inspiring climax of the opera and an artistic celebration of the heroic refusal of church dogma.³⁵

³³ <https://www.atlassociety.org/post/mozarts-don-giovanni-an-enlightenment-hero>

³⁴ *Mozart and the Enlightenment, Truth, Virtue and Beauty in Mozart's Operas*, Nicholas Till, 1992, WWNorton&Company, New York London, p 200

³⁵ <https://www.atlassociety.org/post/mozarts-don-giovanni-an-enlightenment-hero>

Therefore, Don Giovanni shifts from a farce character from the original story *El burlador de Sevilla* and a “philosopher” of Molière to someone with more emotions, which develops a deeper spiritual state and meaning in the story.

And yet in the opera, some aspects of Don Giovanni's traditional personality are still very much the same. We cannot deny that he is erotic and lascivious, a sexual libertine. In the aria *Madamina, il catalogo è questo* (also known as the *Catalogue Aria*), women are not characterized for him by their individuality but only matter to him because they can be added up. From what Leporello told Alvira, it is obvious that he regards women as his achievements:

“My dear lady, this is the list

Of the beauties my master has loved,

A list which I have compiled.

Observe, read along with me.

In Italy, six hundred and forty;

In Germany, two hundred and thirty-one;

A hundred in France; in Turkey, ninety-one;

But in Spain already one thousand and three.”

Besides the bad habits of personal life, the most serious accusation against Don Giovanni's heroism is that he is a murderer or a raper. People might exaggerate the beginning scene when Don Giovanni argues with Donna Anna. Donna Anna explicitly makes the

accusation that Don Giovanni is a rapist in Act 1, Scene 3. In the opening of the opera, Donna Anna becomes angry with Don Giovanni and begins calling him names. It is confusing why she calls him a "betrayed". "Betrayed" indicates that Don breaks his words and suggests that she is unhappy with him for leaving her, which means she was not forced in the first place. Furthermore, it seems like she is clinging to him when he tries to leave since she says, "Do not expect me ever to let you escape, unless you kill me." This also suggests that later on, her explanation to her fiancé Don Ottavio about how Don Giovanni snuck into her bedroom late at night and she mistook him for Don Ottavio is not convincing.

The accusation of him being a murderer is also claimed to be false. Here is the reason: "To begin with, killing someone in a duel is not murder. Furthermore, Don Giovanni refuses to fight Donna Anna's father. The Don's refusal takes his actions out of the arena of murder."³⁶ On the other hand, the Commendatore does not act properly. As head of civil authority, his professional standards call on him to investigate accusations of crime. However, the Commendatore just simply proposes to execute Don Giovanni. These two very ambiguities can not simply conclude Don Giovanni as an absolute villain.

Back to Don Giovanni's heroism. His heroism is shown as being a staunch individualist who questions the standard values of society and walks on the path of self even though some of his beliefs are not accepted by his society or even ours which reflects the ideas of the Enlightenment. There is a very political refrain in the libretto of *Don Giovanni*: "Viva la Libertà." Although when the opera was presented in Italy, the refrain was so upsetting to the authorities that it was changed to "Viva la Società", which reflects on writers' ideas during the

³⁶ <https://www.atlassociety.org/post/mozarts-don-giovanni-an-enlightenment-hero>

Enlightenment: "freedom," "individual liberation," and "returning to nature." Mozart (1756-1791) lived during the peak of the Enlightenment. Therefore, the Enlightenment has a direct influence on his work and his music. Professor of Opera and Music Theatre Nicholas Till comments that "Mozart's operas are not only passionately engaged with the immediate social and intellectual problems of their era, but also (like the plays of Shakespeare, with which they share many common themes and preoccupations) reflect upon the lasting spiritual condition of modern man. And no art has met modern humanity's longing for wholeness and reconciliation as has Mozart's music."³⁷ The influence of the Enlightenment was very evident in Germany and Austria. Mozart's values are directly related to the Enlightenment. His works advocate "Enlightenment thinking—with its rejection of rigid church strictures, celebration of the natural, and rejection of the mind-body dichotomy—was used by libertines throughout Europe, a sort of Playboy Philosophy of its day."³⁸

Even with the heroism, as mentioned in the introduction, some scholars have concerns that *Don Giovanni* will mislead the youths. However, it is clearly shown that Mozart never compliments Don Giovanni's improper behaviors with women from Leporello's lyrics. Later on, when Don Giovanni asks Leporello how everything goes, after seeing Donna Anna's screams for her dead father, Leporello says: "badly" because "by chattering, flattery and lies, tricks I picked up from you, I tried to detain them." Psychiatrist Leo Weinstein has an interesting analysis of Don Giovanni's mental activity: Don traps himself among women and also within the inner turmoil. He does not gain happiness through possessing women anymore, instead he gets

³⁷ *Mozart and the Enlightenment, Truth, Virtue and Beauty in Mozart's Operas*, Nicholas Till, 1992, WWNorton&Company, New York London, p 6

³⁸ <https://www.atlassociety.org/post/mozarts-don-giovanni-an-enlightenment-hero>

disappointed again and again.³⁹ This disappointment makes him cynical, questioning the authority of God, and indulging in even crazier pleasures. Every time a beloved bride is lured by him and the happiness of a couple is destroyed violently, it is a glorious victory for Don Giovanni against God. Don Giovanni keeps challenging God defiantly by pursuing his desire, however, his desire is never fulfilled which drives him into anger.

This shows that Don Giovanni represents the inner self struggle of men: the eternal struggle between desire and love (we want these two things to be achieved at the same time, but we realize that it is never going to happen), the contradiction between emotion and reason, spirit and body, salvation and blasphemy.

Don Giovanni tried to liberate himself from morality, his pleasure is based on ignoring social rules and self power. Don Giovanni represents a very powerful and uncontrollable irrationality in human nature : what Leporello told Donna Elvira:

“He seduces the old ones

For the pleasure of adding to the list.

His greatest favourite

Is the young beginner.

It doesn't matter if she's rich,

Ugly or beautiful;

³⁹ *The Metamorphoses of Don Juan*, Leo Weinstein, Stanford University Press, 1959

If she wears a skirt,

You know what he does”.

Don Giovanni claims that “Women are more necessary to me than the bread I eat! Than the air I breathe!” and "Love is much the same in any form. He who remains faithful to one is being cruel to the others; I, who have an overabundance of sentiment, love them all". He always displays his charm which women admire so much that they forget that he is a “monster, criminal, pack of lies” (said by Elvira). This reflects what has been discussed in the Molière chapter. Don Giovanni is considered as an animal that only follows its desires and instinct. Mozart has a strong position that Don Giovanni is paying for his improper behaviors with women. Although this can be argued as evidence of making him heroic. In the famous final scene, facing the commander, Don Giovanni refuses to repent. Every time he blurts out a resolute "no" in replying to the request of confessing. As a result, he is punished by the flames of hell. Bernard Shaw said in *Man and Superman* that Mozart showcased Don Giovanni's "heroic" with "magical harmonies, elfin tones, and elate darting rhythms as of summer lightning.", he embodies “the heroism of daring to be the enemy of God. From Prometheus to my own Devil's Disciple, such enemies have always been popular”.⁴⁰ It can be seen that Don Giovanni has transformed from a cautionary image to a tragic hero truthful to his own fate.

Now it comes to the music of *Don Giovanni*. The music of *Don Giovanni* is influenced by the *Sturm und Drang* movement that happened in the late 1760s to early 1780s in Germany. This movement directly triggered a revolution in the fields of German literature and music. Composers began to pay more attention to the minor-key. Two excellent examples of Sturm und

⁴⁰ Bernard Shaw, *Man and Superman*, Echo Library, 2006, p7

Drang in music are the opening bars of Mozart's Piano Concerto in D Minor or the overture to his opera *Don Giovanni*.

Mozart also uses music to describe different personalities. He and Da Ponte seem to have drawn inspiration from *El burlador de Sevilla* and *Don Juan ou le Festin de Pierre*. For example, they borrow Donna Anna from Tirso and reduce the influence of Don Giovanni's father; replacing Isabella with Alvira; Sganarelle, Don Giovanni's servant, with Leporello in Molière's play. His portrayal of Leporello deepens the drama of the play, not only deepening the overall traumatic atmosphere, but also providing an opportunity for Mozart to create complex music. The difference of how Mozart uses music to distinguish classes is obvious. Leporello is cowardly, fussing, dependent, and fetishistic. When Leporello complains about his boss in the beginning of the opera, Mozart uses music that almost stomps along, conveying lower-class crudeness and capturing the feelings of hatred expressed in the libretto. Later in the opera, Mozart enhances our perception of Don Giovanni's courage by showing Leporello as a coward. The music given to Leporello in the final scene when the statue arrives for dinner suggests fear so strong that Leporello can't control himself. The complexity of the music helps the audience to understand different personalities, and brings out the heroism of Don Giovanni.

There are two details that show how carefully Mozart writes the music. Till points out that

in each of his arias the opportunity for modulation of emotion or tone is denied. Giovanni launches himself into 'Fin ch'han dal vino', never pausing for respite or breath until he has completed his obsessive, repetitive list of the

physical pleasures of food, drink, dance, song and, almost as an afterthought, sex. The serenade 'Deh vieni' is an endless cantilena, lacking repose until it relapses into mere strophic repetition, at which point one imagines that Giovanni will probably keep going like an automaton, churning out verses until he has attained his purpose. (refers to Exemple 1, bar 78)⁴¹

I take the analysis of “like an automaton” as an interpretation that Don Giovanni is never stopping the chase after women and will never be satisfied.

Exemple 1

66

giar, vo'a - mo - reg - giar. Ah la mia li - sta do - manmat -

73

ti - na d'u - na de - ci - na de - vi au - men - tar.

80

Ah la mia li - sta d'u - na de - ci - na de - vi au - men - tar. Se trovi in

⁴¹ *Mozart and the Enlightenment, Truth, Virtue and Beauty in Mozart's Operas*, Nicholas Till, 1992, WWNorton&Company, New York London, p 202

Bar. 11 Se - ne - ghia-me... di - dar - qual -

Pno.

Bar. 21 Tu - ch'ai - la boc - ca - dol - ce

Pno.

Bar. 26 che - ri - sto - ro - Da - van - tia - gli oc - chi -

Pno.

Bar. 30 tuoi - mo - rit - vo - gl'i - ol -

Pno.

Bar. 31 mez - zo al - co - re!

Pno.

2 A. Barbou 3

(example 2)

To conclude, the growth of resistant emotions of Mozart is consistent within this revolutionary period. “Mozart did not see himself as a gentle lamb, nor did he see himself as a sacrifice under the enslavement of the feudal system. It was only when the system that bound him covered himself that he began to have rebellious thoughts.”⁴² Mozart felt that the rebellious spirit was an urgent need of pursuing freedom. As a musician, his response is to compose. In *The Marriage of Figaro*, Mozart put this revolutionary spirit in, which unfortunately led to the failure of his career in Vienna because it offended the nobles. Thus, Mozart was very much a man of his

⁴² 赵胜丹, 探析莫扎特心中真正的“唐璜”, 北方音乐, 2014 13 (Zhao Shengdan, Exploring the True Don Juan in Mozart's Heart, Northern Music, 2014 13)

time. The spirit of Don Giovanni delivers the ideas of the Enlightenment: reason, individual and against rank, convention, superstition, and church.

Kerns says that:

The Don has good points and bad. We can admire and even envy him for his good points without embracing his bad ones. Don Giovanni's moral ambivalence lends energy to the opera. If the Don is a pure villain, then the opera becomes a story of his capture and punishment. If the Don is a pure hero, then the opera becomes a John Wayne remake: We bond with the hero and then he dies for the cause.⁴³

However, *Don Giovanni* is just an opera. It is to be appreciated in a theater. Although at the same time the opera offers us a rich encounter with question and thoughts such as: is Don Giovanni a villain or a hero? It invites us to think about the issues of women's situations in society, the attitude towards life, the value of truthfulness, and how one should treat others. But as Kerns reminds us that “the story doesn't have to be completely coherent and doesn't have to be philosophically perfect,” if we are clear about our own values, then we should have the ability to tell which values of Don Giovanni ought to be appreciated.

In the following chapter, I will discuss how the contemporary musical *Don Juan* completely changes the character to make it easier to be shown on the stage.

⁴³ <https://www.atlassociety.org/post/mozarts-don-giovanni-an-enlightenment-hero>

Saved by Love, a Redemption for a Sentimental Hero:

Félix Gray's Don Juan

French composer Félix Gray adapted the classic story of Don Juan in 2003. In the following year, the musical *Don Juan* was brought to the stage in Canada by director Gilles Maheu. This musical endows the story with a modern understanding, and it waters down the scandalous aspect of the character, interpreting the figure more from an emotional perspective that effectively changes the original plot into a modern love story. Like Gray said during an event following *Don Juan's* Shanghai premiere: "In the musical, Don Juan falls in love. Love becomes his biggest punishment, as he has broken the hearts of so many women, and then finds a love that borders on madness."⁴⁴

Don Juan encountered immense success and positive comments from the very beginning: 200,000 albums were sold even before its premiere.⁴⁵ In the following year, the musical made the leap to the stage at the Théâtre St-Denis de Montréal for the first time. The producer Paul Dupont-Hébert touted that "*Don Juan*, c'est une œuvre fantastique et des chansons inoubliables. En fait, c'est aussi gros – sinon plus ! – que *Notre-Dame de Paris* (which according to the *Guinness Book of Records*, was the most successful first year of any musical ever)."⁴⁶ The staging was especially appreciated by the public. Christian St-Pierre, from the Quebec website

⁴⁴ <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202402/06/WS65c1872da3104efcbdae9dab.html>

⁴⁵ Sylvain Cormier, « Don Juan au théâtre Saint-Denis - Un bon spectacle au centre mou », sur *Le Devoir*, 19 février 2004

⁴⁶ *Don Juan*, is a fantastic work with unforgettable songs. In fact, it is as big – if not bigger – than *Notre Dame de Paris*.
<https://www.journaldemontreal.com/2023/01/31/don-juan-courtisera-le-quebec-a-lete-2024>

“*Voir*”, points out that “les danseurs, virtuoses, sont la véritable colonne vertébrale du spectacle, sa substance, son cœur.”⁴⁷ Sylvain Cormier, journalist of *Le Devoir*, regards the choreography as “le plus grand attrait du spectacle.”⁴⁸ A year later, it came to Paris, and according to France-Soir, “la comédie musicale a triomphé devant le tout Paris. [...] Le flamenco, danse sensuelle et violente, vient à point nommé.”⁴⁹ However the musical’s narrative received skepticism: “Le fil narratif est distendu, l’intrigue, hasardeuse, relâchée, quand elle ne fait pas carrément du sur-place.”⁵⁰

Besides the comments about the performance, it is indeed hard to find praise for the story itself. As a musical, the songs and dances are taking the biggest roles; thus the plot is almost limited to a succession of songs and vignettes. In the book *Storytelling in Opera and Musical Theater*, Nina Penner mentions that lack of narration is a problem that exists in most operas or musicals. These artforms depend on spoken dialogue or recitative to promote the plot, which does not happen much in *Don Juan*. Rebecca-Anne C. Do Rozario, an adjunct research fellow explains:

The appellation increasingly applied to French musicals is spectacle. The term, spectacle, is itself applied to divergent styles and genres of entertainment. A close translation is simply “show.” The appellation is not in consistent use and the musical theater described has

⁴⁷ the dancers, virtuosos, are the real backbone of the show, its substance, its heart
Christian St-Pierre, « Don Juan: Pour le meilleur et pour le pire », sur *Voir.ca*

⁴⁸ the greatest attraction of the show

Sylvain Cormier, « Don Juan au théâtre Saint-Denis - Un bon spectacle au centre mou », sur *Le Devoir*, 19 février 2004

⁴⁹ the musical has triumphed over the whole of Paris. [...] Flamenco, a sensual and violent dance, comes just in time.
« DON JUAN - Palais des Congrès | THEATREonline.com », sur *www.theatreonline.com*

⁵⁰ The narrative thread is distorted, the plot, risky, loose, when it does not outright overshadow
Christian St-Pierre, « Don Juan : Pour le meilleur et pour le pire », sur *Voir.ca*

also been referred to as opéra-rock and comédie musicale. The French musicals, developing from rock operas, maintain the operatic balance: the songs become the dominant aesthetic, dictating the performance. However, most rock operas and megamusicals (like *Don Juan*), contain a minimum of spoken dialogue. Plus the songs are not strongly connected to each other. Pop driven, the songs are themselves able to compete individually in the music industry, and the scores and thus the dramaturgy do not incorporate song and scene cohesively, but idiosyncratically as in MTV and pop concerts.⁵¹

This might explain why Gray chooses the genre musical. As mentioned earlier, the appearance of *Don Juan*'s sentimental side makes an outstanding difference in this musical compared to the other two previously analyzed works. Since the staging is highlighted, the audience is let to pay less attention to the story. Therefore *Don Juan*'s personality changes more smoothly.

Don Juan from the fiction has been described as a villain, a trickster, “a wicked master” (from Sganarelle’s mouth in Molière’s *Don Juan*), or someone who “ne connaissait ni amour, ni pitié, ni regret, ni respect.”⁵² However in this musical, *Don Juan*, the libertine, for the first time appears as a person whose sensitive part has been revealed — he experiences love: “Le voilà

⁵¹ *The French Musicals: The Dramatic Impulse of Spectacle*, Rebecca-Anne C. Do Rozario
<https://journals.ku.edu/jdtc/article/view/3504/3380>

⁵² does not know love, pity, regret or respect (Félix Gray, *Don Juan*)

condamné à l'amour, amour qui signera sa chute. Cette passion nouvelle et sincère naîtra avec Maria, sculptrice ingénue promise à un autre...⁵³

In an interview, Félix Gray said that he has been fascinated for a long time by this figure, and he wished to make a musical based on him.⁵⁴ He decided to make the story originally come from the play *Dom Juan ou le Festin de pierre* by Molière. Unlike the previous works, Gray aspires to present another face of this seducer, a more vulnerable, more sensitive facet that we did not suspect. According to him: “Le bourreau des cœurs n’est pas invulnérable...”⁵⁵



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⁵³ Here he is condemned to love, which marks his fall. This new and sincere passion will be born with Maria (the girl he falls in love with in the show, an ingenue sculptor promised to another...

⁵⁴ *Don Juan* sur comediesmusicales.net

⁵⁵ The executioner of hearts is not invulnerable...
<http://www.comediesmusicales.net/page.php?page=spectacle&idlien=403>

⁵⁶ Photo comes from video *Don Juan*: <https://b23.tv/k8q9nWK>

He did not want to place his version of the story in the 17th century. Instead, he chose a timeless Spain that corresponds to no specific century, which causes him no conflict with historical plausibility while maintaining sword play.

The story starts at night when Don Juan decides to seduce the daughter of the commander in Séville. The commander duels with him and is killed by him. After the commander's death, people build a statue to memorialize him. The voice beyond the stage curses that Don Juan would eventually die for love. Don Juan seduces Elvira and promises to marry her, but later he abandons her. Not long after, he sleeps with the beautiful dancer Andalouse who is the fiance of a gypsy singer, Chico, but he leaves her after one night of love. Don Juan does not believe in true love until one day he meets the sculptor, Maria: it is love at first sight. However, her fiancé, Raphaël, returns from the battlefield and is filled with fury after being told that Maria is in love with another man. Raphaël is tormented by the pain of heartbreak and decides to seek revenge

against Don Juan. Maria is almost desperate in the entanglement of new and old love. Don Juan, in order to defend his own honor, disregards the suggestions from Don Carlos and his father Don Luis and fights with Raphaël. Don Juan does not want to hurt Raphaël, since he



thinks that this would break Maria's heart. When he has the absolute advantage, he throws his sword away and is stabbed by Raphaël. He chooses death for his love, and therefore he keeps love in the heart of this woman forever. Curtains.

Unlike how Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni* features the conflict between Don Juan and Donna Anna in the opening scene, the musical starts with an "elegant dance" of the two fully masked, therefore no one can tell what is actually happening between Donna Anna and Don Juan. There is no dialogue between the characters. All information is given by a narrator who uses "séduire" which means "seduce" to describe what Don Juan has done. In this case, it gives the minimum sense of a sexual violence. The motive to build a statue of the commander is not initially clear because of the lack of dialogue. It is only explained in the song:

À l'image de l'homme qu'il était vraiment
 Un père espagnol tué par Don Juan
 On la posera là sur la place d'honneur
 Pour que tout le monde voit
 La statue du commandeur.⁵⁷

The spirit of the commander is present throughout the entire musical and is featured more than in Molière's *Don Juan* or *Don Giovanni*. It makes his voice known very early in the

⁵⁷ In the image of the man who he really was
 A Spanish father killed by Don Juan
 We will put it there in the place of honour
 So that everyone will see
 The statue of the commander
 — *Un Grand Homme est Mort* (All lyrics and translations from website
<https://lyricstranslate.com/en/1039homme-qui-tout-man-who-has-everything.html-0>)

musical: a mysterious and terrifying voice appears above the stage: “tu seras maudit, Don Juan!”

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The attitude of Don Carlos (the servant of Don Juan) towards his master is quite unusual. Sganarelle (servant from Molière’s *Don Juan*) describes Don Juan as follows: “ Don Juan, mon maître, le plus grand scélérat que la terre ait jamais porté, un enragé, un chien, un diable, [...] , et traite de billevesées tout ce que nous croyons.⁵⁹” On the other hand, Leporello in the opera tells Don Giovanni: “my dear master, the life you are leading is that of a knave!” But in Don Carlos’ eyes, Don Juan is not a complete villain anymore. He sings about his master with very complicated feelings: he has known him for a long time, but he never understood his master. He knows all his actions, but nothing about Don Juan himself . He loves him while he hates him. He describes Don Juan as a man who possesses everything but nothing; he wants everything but has nothing left at the end:

L'homme qui a tout mais qui n'a rien

Celui qui veut tout posséder

Sans jamais pouvoir le garder

L'homme qui a tout

Mais qui ne voit rien

De l’amour qui passe à côté de lui

Sans jamais s'arrêter ⁶⁰

⁵⁸ you will be cursed, Don Juan!

⁵⁹ Don Juan, my master, the greatest renegade that the earth has ever endured, a wild man, a dog, a devil, a Turk, a heretic, who does not believe in Heaven, Hell, or the Wolf-man, who disports in this life as a thoroughly brute beast, a pig of Epicurus, a true Sardanapalus, who closes his ears to all Christian remonstrances that one could make to him, and treats all that we believe as empty words p6

⁶⁰ The man who has everything but who has nothing
The one who wants to possess everything
Without ever being able to keep it
The man who has everything
But who sees nothing

While Don Juan is walking in the dark with his mask, these lyrics picture a lonely, mysterious image which even makes people pity him. Don Carlos said that love never stops for Don Juan, which brings up Don Juan's "other sensitive part" since Don Juan never seems to care about love in the play or in the opera. Don Carlos seems to have more respect and admiration towards Don Juan.

Gray added the character of Isabel into his work (this figure exists neither in Molière's play nor Mozart's *Don Giovanni*), which is drawn from Tirso de Molina's *El burlador de Sevilla*. Isabela is originally a duchess that Don Juan tricks. In Gray's musical, Isabel is created as a fortune-teller, she states Don Juan's guilt and curses his destiny : "Et qu'il ne reste que le diable, comme seul invité à ta table (And may the Devil will be the only guest sitting at your table)" (*Cœur de pierre*).⁶¹ This character can help the audience understand the story better since she acts as a narrator.

In the song *Mon Nom*, Don Juan for the first time takes off his mask, steps onto the middle of the stage and sings in reply to Isabel's prediction in a powerful major key. When Don Giovanni or Molière's Don Juan talk about their belief, we see a scoundrel more or less, but both Jean-François Breau (cast Don Juan in 2004) and Gian Marco (2024) act Don Juan in a heroic way that he looks like one even though he may not. Don Juan himself emphasizes his powerful charisma in the song confidently. He regards himself as the center of the world. He pronounces

Of the love that passes by him
Without ever stopping

— *L'homme qui a tout*

⁶¹ All further references of the songs that appear later are to be found in the video: <https://b23.tv/k8q9nWK>

that his name “sera une étincelle, Qui brillera de plus en plus fort”⁶². The word “shine” really promotes his self-described heroism.

As one of Don Juan’s victims, Elvira gets the promise that Don Juan will marry her and is soon after betrayed, causing her heartbreak. In the song *Les Femmes*, Don Carlos comforts her and tells her that women should live for themselves. Here is another aspect of the musical that shows Gray paying attention to contemporary politics: this song is full of praise for women.

Don Juan’s father was not mentioned in Mozart’s opera and in Molière’s play, he feels shameful towards Don Juan. In Gray’s work, the father, Don Luis, expresses his love for Don Juan:

Je t’aime
 Plus que personne au monde
 Ne pourra t’aimer⁶³

and he patiently gives his son a lecture. He advises Don Juan that

Personne ne vit ta vie pour toi
 Tu traceras seul le chemin
 Ce n’est que toi qui choisiras
 S’il sera le mal ou le bien
 Tu seras le seul à payer
 Ce que tu auras dépensé⁶⁴

⁶² will be a spark, That will shine stronger and stronger (*Mon nom*)

⁶³ I love you
 More than anyone else in the world
 Could love you
 —*Mon Fils, Don Juan*

⁶⁴ No one can live your life for you
 You will draw your path alone
 No one but you will choose

Don Luis' words "No one but you will choose if it is the bad or the good" proclaims his wish that Don Juan can still choose the good. In the play and the opera, besides accusing and mocking, no one has given advice to Don Juan with an honest heart.

In *Les Fleurs du Mal*⁶⁵, Don Carlos gives Don Juan the same advice to do good and to accumulate virtue, but Don Juan dismisses it and claims,

Je ne serai jamais complice



If it is the bad or the good
 You will be the only one to pay
 What you have spent
 —*Mon Fils, Don Juan*

⁶⁵ *Les Fleurs du mal* is a volume of French poetry by Charles Baudelaire. *The Flowers of Evil*. Here Gray uses it as the title of his song.

Photo from website
https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?__biz=MzU5MzQ3NDE4MA==&mid=2247912146&idx=1&sn=81c882aa04d679e403aea44cb2df91b7

De ceux qui veulent m’emmener vers le ciel.⁶⁶

His resistance to “le ciel” clearly shows his anti religious attitude which is claimed as a heroic element in the previous chapters.

Until the end of act I, Don Juan is still arrogant and argues with the statue that he will never compromise. The statue then says: “Ta punition sera l’amour⁶⁷” to indicate the complete reversal of Don Juan’s belief towards love.

Maria, the sculptor, enters the stages. In the article *An analysis of the creative characteristics of French musicals*, it says that “One of the most distinguished impression that French musicals bring the audiences is that the drama is more important than the actual story”⁶⁸. With nothing happening in between, Don Juan’s attitude towards love just flips after the glimpse of her:

Après avoir touché le satin de sa peau

Après avoir scié le dernier des barreaux

Pour elle j’ai changé⁶⁹

⁶⁶ I will never be an accomplice
to those who want to take me to heaven
—*Les Fleurs du mal, Don Juan*

⁶⁷ Love will be your punishment

⁶⁸ 法语音乐剧创作特点浅析(An analysis of the creative characteristics of French musicals)
https://wenku.baidu.com/view/645e27fbf624ccbff121dd36a32d7375a417c6f2.html?_wks_ =1706374268552&bdQuery=法语音乐剧文献&needWelcomeRecommand=1

⁶⁹ after touching the satin of her skin
After sawing off the last bars
For her, I changed

The romantic side of Don Juan appears, and he claims that he will change for Maria. They fall in love with each other immediately.

Chico and Elvira witness this and they start to accuse Don Juan's past sins and point out that his words should not be trusted and that his past actions should not be forgiven. How the song *Qui* is staged is thought-provoking. The two singers and all the dancers are covered with masks, with spooky red lighting. As we all know, in the original story, Don Juan himself is the person labeled as "camouflaged." Here everyone except Don Juan and Maria is mocked. The staging makes clear that what Don Juan is being accused of, everyone else has committed as well. It makes Chico and Elvira look like two jealous people who want to destroy the happiness of Don Juan and Maria, and because of their anger, they do not want Don Juan to be forgiven.

The most prominent change in this adaptation is the final scene. Gray decides to overthrow the remaining supernatural power in all the other works. He makes Don Juan be killed by another man instead of the supernatural there is no hell in the musical. This brings the story closer to our life and highlights the "human emotion" of the musical. Raphaël is filled with fury back from the battlefield after being told by Elvira that his fiancée Maria is in love with another man; he kills Don Juan in the sword fight.

Here is what Elvira tells Raphaël

Toi, qui reviens comme un soldat

Fier de tes médailles, tes combats

Sais-tu qu'ils ont sali ton nom

Et ton honneur à la fois

Venge-toi, venge-moi⁷⁰

Compared to the female characters in Mozart's opera, Mozart's Zerlina is a smart woman who comes up with ideas to punish the villain Don Giovanni for everyone's sake. But to bring out Don Juan's heroism, Gray describes Elvira as a parochial avenger who tries to manipulate Raphaël to satisfy herself.

As a contradiction, this song is followed by a romantic love song by Don Juan and Maria in which they affirm:

Toi, ma raison de vivre
 De tout abandonner
 Mon envie de te suivre
 Pour apprendre à t'aimer
 Tout le temps qu'il me reste
 Je veux te le donner
 Seulement l'amour
 Jusqu'au bout de nos nuits
 Qu'il nous emmène
 Pour ne pas qu'on oublie Que par amour
 On donnerait nos vies
 Pardon à ceux
 Qui n'auraient pas compris⁷¹.

⁷⁰ You, who return like a soldier
 Proud of your medals, your battles
 Did you know they dirtied your name
 And at the same time your honor
 Avenge yourself, avenge us – *Venge-nous*

⁷¹ You, my reason to live
 To abandon everything
 My desire to follow you
 To learn to love you
 All the time that I have left

With such warm music and the sweet couple who sings it being deeply in love, it gives the feeling that whatever destroys this relationship is considered evil. This contrasts with the original story where everyone longs for a bad ending for Don Juan.

After knowing the truth, Raphaël goes to argue with Don Juan and Don Juan proposes a duel with Raphaël. Both his servant and his father believe that Don Juan will easily win and kill Raphaël; they beg him not to go so this can be a salvation for Don Juan if he does not take the young man's life. However, Don Juan throws his sword away at the end of the battle and chooses death since he wants to protect Maria's feelings by not hurting Raphaël. He dies because of love, as the statue has predicted in its curse.

The musical ends with song *Don Juan est mort*, sung by all the other characters together. Everyone remembers him as a brave, honorable hero that "il n'y aura pas un jour sans oublier qu'il était là."⁷²

The musical is touring China right now, and it has garnered lots of appreciation. In this adaptation, it achieves Don Juan's salvation after his resistance to repent for thousands of years. There is one review that says: "I always thought of Don Juan as a libertine, a villain with no responsibility. However, my mind completely changed after watching the French musical. It gives a completely new interpretation: love is redemption, it is sacrifice, it is to do everything

I want to give it to you
 Only love
 Until the end of our nights
 That it may take us away
 For that we will not forget
 That for love
 We would give our lives
 Forgive those
 Who will not have understood
 – *Seulement L'Amour*

⁷² there won't be one day that I won't forget he was there

you can to make the other happy. Love is complicated and innocent, Don Juan's love story is explained by lots of philosophical lyrics in this musical."⁷³ As discussed in the beginning of the chapter, this comment corroborates that *Don Juan* has a loose narrative. If one enters the theater to "see the story," he might be disappointed. The plot is not progressed step by step, as sometimes the audience has to guess what is going on from the aria. The personality change of Don Juan is also somewhat abrupt. The libertine suddenly becomes a "love warrior," with a lack of showing the motivation that led to the character's change.

However, to some extent this characteristic drawback of French musicals has become a feature: with the passionate melodies, the narrative of the plot has been compromised. "This is not a passive abstention, but an active abandonment. The songs without being interrupted, the melodies making the audience scream, and the unleashed passion have already overcome the rationality of narrative. You may not believe in the plot, but how can you resist so many beautiful songs?"⁷⁴

⁷³Comment found on website <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/T6FAuWa-i3XGtbEXkx8xgQ>

⁷⁴ Comment found on website <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1794330000663858866&wfr=spider&for=pc>

Conclusion

Don Juan is controversial and mysterious. He loves fighting, alcohol, and pleasure-seeking. His belief towards relationships is hard for us to accept; but at the same time, he possesses undeniable heroic features. He hurts people surrounding him while the others are not fully innocent. Music critic and professor Xiaobo Han at Tianjin Conservatory of Music says: “Don Juan is not completely absurd. He is a villain with many virtues, and he is surrounded by many innocent upstanding people with many sins.”⁷⁵ We never know what Don Juan wants, and we even cannot tell if he is happy or not. As Weinstein describes: “But what of Don Juan? His name has become a household word. Everybody is talking about him, but nobody can be quite sure of what he is talking about.”⁷⁶ This might be the reason why Don Juan provides enormous imagination for all kinds of adaptations. This is also where the charm of literature and art lies as Gray claims: “you can choose a character as you want, then enter his world. He will take you on a new journey. You rely on each other and achieve mutual success.”⁷⁷

Let us take a look at how each of the three works ends. In Molière’s play, Don Juan falls into the great flames of hell. The play ends with the lonely Sganarelle lamenting his unpaid salary. Don Giovanni is dragged down to hell as well, but Mozart adds a final celebration. The remaining characters announce their plans for the future: Donna Anna and Don Ottavio will get married after Donna Anna's year of mourning; Donna Elvira will withdraw from society for the

⁷⁵ Comment found on website https://m.163.com/dy/article/D3UT0H9F0514A5ED.html?spss=adap_pc

⁷⁶ *The Metamorphoses of Don Juan*, Leo Weinstein, P2

⁷⁷ https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/bUPJw1jNW-gfx3kZxg_xHQ

rest of her life; Zerlina and Masetto can finally go home; and Leporello will go to search for a better master.

The concluding ensemble also delivers the moral of this opera – "Such is the end of the evildoer: the death of a sinner always reflects his life."⁷⁸ As for the musical, we already discussed the outstanding change of Don Juan's fate in the final chapter. Don Juan dies in every single work. But this figure keeps coming back, and every time it provides us with more and more thoughts.

“Being passionate for life and daring to die for love, these strong emotions frequently appear in the musical. This work fits the taste of Chinese audiences well,”⁷⁹ said Laurent Ban, who has performed several other musicals in China. To be honest, I felt frustrated when I saw his interview. Maybe Laurent did not mean to please the audience, but it seems to me that there is a tendency of avoiding the truth. I fell in love with the musical when I first discovered it because of the fascinating songs, but with more and more research, the project has become merchandise for me since it only shows people the beautiful side of life. The soul of the character is lost. Back to the “banning *Don Giovanni* problem,” according to how the Chinese entertainment system selects work for the public, if there are any ambiguous elements that might cause controversy (especially when it comes to the “untalkable” topic in China: sex), *Don Juan* would not pass the Chinese market selection.

At the same time, if Gray did not make the change of Don Juan, people would not even be able to see this musical and experience the amazing songs it brings us. When diluting Don Juan, Gray might have already been aware of cultural apprehension towards his content. Thus we

⁷⁸ *Questo è il fin di chi fa mal, e de' perfidi la morte alla vita è sempre ugual*

⁷⁹ https://m.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_26165169

might want to think about “hypocrisy” from an opposite direction: rather than analyzing Don Juan’s masks, who is being hypocritical? Don Juan or us? Don Juan, all in all, is just a fictional figure. It has its right to exist and to be known by people who are interested in it. It is us who are trying to twist and vanish an historical existence and claim proudly that our world should be full of morality despite what is going on in the dark corners.

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