THE ROGUE (TRICKSTER) OF SEVILLE (1630)
(El burlador de Sevilla) by Tirso de Molina

I. The Myth of Don Juan

Don Juan, a fictitious character, is generally regarded as a symbol of libertinism. Libertinism is immoral behavior that is not restrained by conscience or conventions.

The legend tells how Don Juan seduced the daughter of the commander of Seville and then killed her father in a duel when he sought revenge. Later Don Juan visited a statue of his victim and flippantly invited it to dinner. The statue came to life and dragged Don Juan off to hell (foreshadowed Don Juan’s own death).

Don Juan was first given literary personality in the 1630 tragic (tragicomic) drama The Seducer/Rogue/Trickster of Seville by the Spanish dramatist Tirso de Molina. In this version the drama is heightened by Don Juan’s attractive qualities—his lively character, arrogant courage, and sense of humor (his ways of seducing women). The drama’s power comes from its rapid pace. There is growing tension as Don Juan’s enemies hound him (for justice and honor) to self-destruction. Our main character refuses to repent and falls to eternal damnation (but in Zorrilla’s version, Don Juan does repent and ask for God’s mercy through Doña Inés’s love, thus the aspect of religious conversion is manifested). Through Tirso’s version, Don Juan became a universal figure, comparable to Hamlet and Don Quixote.

In the 17th century the Don Juan story was incorporated into the repertoire of strolling Italian players who carried the legend to France (Molière’s Le Festin de Pierre, 1665). By the 19th century many foreign versions of the Don Juan existed. Some of these musical and literary works include Mozart’s opera Don Giovanni, produced in 1787, Lord Byron’s satiric poem Don Juan (1819-24), and George Bernard Shaw’s drama Man and Superman (performed in 1907), including the
well-known third act, “Don Juan in Hell”.

The myth of Don Juan is normally embodied by two structures. One is that the story of a trickster (*burlador*), who practices tricks in diverse natures, and finally is tricked by someone whose power is beyond the character. The second structure deals with the story of “double invitation”, which has something to do with the laws of hospitality, in this instance, the story of *The Trickster of Seville* is fitted in this frame.

**II. Structure**

The play is divided into three acts. Though it means to take place in the 14th century, most of social events and characters are contemporaries of our dramatist. Tirso does not comply with the theatrical convention of three unities: time, space and action. The story takes place at least four locations within different time frames: Napoles (Italy), Tarragona, Sevilla, Dos Hermanas (Spain). In terms of the unity of action, some critics say that the play is based on the principle of *escape-persecution*, or the moral logic of *transgression-punishment*.

In this play there is a mixture of comedy and tragedy, varied verse forms, different types of characters ranging from nobles to peasants. Therefore, we can say Tirso’s work fulfills the principles of Lope’s *Arte nuevo*.

**III. Characters**

1. **Catalinón**, the servant of Don Juan, is inseparable from the myth of Don Juan since both the master-transgressor and servant-joker/fool (*gracioso*) constitute the symbolic unity similar to the one formed by Don Quixote and Sancho. More than a character, Catalinón fulfills a mythic function. He takes on the theatrical function of being the fool/joker, on one hand; on the other, his obedience and utmost cooperation represent
a good servant, sometimes also serves as his master’s counselor providing ideas. In
contrast with the arrogance of Don Juan, Catalinón acts as a comic counterpart who
express fears and worries concerning tricks and other immoral crimes committed by
his master. His constant advise is “Those who cheat and toy with women will surely
have their reward… after death” (Act I, 95), “He that lives by tricks will be tricked by
tricks” (Act II, 103).

2 The Commander, Don Gonzalo de Ulloa, is not properly a “character”, but a
“figure”. His lengthy speech about Lisboa leads him to become a connector of two
worlds: the world of political power and the world of religious one. In the moment
of his tragic death Don Gonzalo emphasizes the value of honor and rebukes Don
Juan’s shameful profanity of destroying Dona Ana’s honor: “The barbican of the
tower of my honor has been toppled, traitor. Though my life stood guard there”, ‘My
fury will follow you, traitor. For a traitor is a traitor because he is a coward” (Act II,
107). The stage annotation regarding Don Gonzalo’s appearance in Act III presents
us a messenger from the “Other “ world/the Hell: “Suddenly, he stops, confronted by
Don Gonzalo in the shape of the statue at the tomb . . . Slowly, ponderously, Don
Gonzalo moves toward Don Juan who retreats until they are standing in the center of
the stage” (121-122). He is the symbol of Death, who takes Don Juan’s life in the
end. As Varey observes that “el que la estatua de Don Gonzalo arrastre a Don Juan,
su asesino, al infierno es también poeticamente justo”.

3 Don Juan Tenorio, a noble young man from Seville, is the main character of the
play. His arrogant courage (never fearful of death), lively character and sense of
humor especially on love tricks constitute the prototype of Don Juan whose attractive
qualities have made him a universal character. The audience loves and admires Don
Juan, but the church condemns his libertinism, his shameful profanity against the
honor of women.
In Tirso’s version, we get to know Don Juan through the character’s monologues (also “asides”) and dialogues with other characters as well. In others’ eyes, the young man is named “rogue”, “villain”, “traitor”, “trickster”, “seducter” throughout the play. He is an individual who only thinks about his own needs, indulged to unrestrained free will/sexual desires for the purpose of enjoying life. His arrogant courage, in contrast to Catalinon’s modesty, lies in his unfearful of Death in numerous passages: “Death cannot frighten or restrain me. Not all of us are in such fear of death”, “Death cannot frighten me” (Act I, 95-96), “After death? So long a time? Then I have ample leisure in which to seek repentance” (Act II, 104), “Death and vengeance hold no terrors for me!” (Act III, 115). Even when he confronts the statue of Don Gonzalo with nervousness, our character does not admit his fear of the dead, which is “villanious” (125) according to his opinion, and what happened in this scene is due to his imagination. It is the value of fame that stimulates and perhaps obliges Don Juan to seek adventures and create the image of a undefeatable and courageous trickster, so that “Tomorrow I shall be his guest in the chapel and all Seville will marvel at my courage” (Act III, 125).

Being a professional seducer, Don Juan constantly practices lies, tricks, and treachery to maintain his “fame”, to certify that his position of being number one in love tricks and arrogance is still undefeated. In this play, our character seduces four women (Duchess Isabella, Dona Ana, Tisbea and Arminta) with different techniques and consequences. In the cases of Isabella and Ana, there is by no means a seduction, but only the impersonation of personality (being false Duke Octavio and Marquis de la Mota, respectively). It is Don Gonzalo de Ulloa whose death impedes our character to accomplish his love tricks. In the cases of Tisbea and Arminta, Don Juan succeeds in his skillful lies and love making. Don Juan’s seduction is based on a structure which is a fusion of treachery and tricks/lies. When he deals with women
from higher class, he cannot seduce them but only through switching roles (impersonation); with women from lower class like Tisbea and Arminta, he is skillful in love hunting, making them a pure object. Thus, some critics even harshly criticize that Don Juan takes advantage of his social position to fulfill his selfishness and obtain impunity from his crimes. In the end, the punishment that Don Juan receives does not contain any religious sense, but only provides us a “poetic” justice.

4. Marquis de la Mota, a young man of noble descent, used to be Don Juan’s buddy in terms of seeking love adventures. Unlike his friend, Marquis is truly in love with Ana. Unfortunately, he is tricked by Don Juan and is forced to serve his sentence as a lamb of expiation.

5. Duke Octavio, also another of noble descent, has gone through similar injustice to Marquis’s. Falling in love with Duchess Isabella, he regards love as a child, so fragile and tender that he is not trustful of his lover, even in doubt of her honor. In one occasion, he acts like an opportunist while being informed by the King to get married with Doña Ana.

6. Batricio, a peasant and husband of Arminta, is the last man tricked by Don Juan. Carefully presented by Tirso, Batricio is not only the antagonist of Don Juan, but also a symbol of opposition between Court and Village. In the wedding, he is conscious of an evil omen by Don Juan’s arrival and express his distaste like “An evil omen, for they must seat him by the bride. I have no appetite for this affair. I am condemned to jealousy, to love, to suffer and be silent”, “And I, the host, say to myself that the hour of your arrival is an evil one” (Act II, 110-111). All these comments also seem to be a presage of his personal unhappy ending. He is the one tricked by Don Juan in a brutal manner in which only through the virtue of “honor”, Batricio is conquered and accepts his unfair situation. Ironically, the value of honor, once felt so strongly in the city, has to take shape in the village (Act III, 113), a social criticism on moral
decadence.

7. **Tisbea**, a fisher girl from Tarragona, is one of the female characters in the play. Being of non-noble descent, she enjoys solitude, freedom, and is proud of not being entrapped by *Love*. She is the one who saves Don Juan from shipwreck onshore and seems to admire his lively character. Unlike other female characters, Tisbea accepts Don Juan’s seduction voluntarily and acts as a seducer as well. She asks Don Juan to keep his promise of marriage by oath “Remember God and death” (96). When she finds out Don Juan’s deceitfulness, Tisbea bursts out crying, expressing her deep desperation and disillusionment by using words “fire” (Fire! Fire! I am burning), (May love have pity on a soul in flames), “water” (Fire, my friends! I beg you for water) (97).

8. **Arminta**, a peasant bride, is the last woman tricked by Don Juan. Though she has conscience of belonging to Batricio, Arminta can not reject our trickster’s sweet words and other seductive temptations. Dramatically, she accepts Don Juan to be her new husband and dreams of being the maiden of higher class. Like Tisbea, Arminta asks Don Juan to keep promise of marriage by oath “Swear to God that you will be damned if you fail” (Act III, 116).

IV. Themes

1. Desire/violence/seduction

2. Love/marriage

3. Libertinism/psychopath

4. Parody/desmitification