

## DON JUAN AND THE BAROQUE

Among the great creations of the seventeenth century, one of the liveliest and most rich in promise is Don Juan. Even the changes that he undergoes from age to age are full of significance. This article will attempt to clarify one aspect of this evolution from a point of view exclusively that of the baroque.<sup>1</sup>

The reader is asked to accept as the basis for these reflections a definition of the baroque which I have given elsewhere,<sup>2</sup> and which I will merely summarize here.

The baroque, conceived in its most general terms, presupposes the simultaneous presence of metamorphosis and disguise, or of mobility and setting, or even, if we resort to emblems as did the seventeenth century, of Proteus and the Peacock.

If there is a literary domain in which this definition applies, it is to be found in the poetry or in the plays of inconstancy and of instability bound up with disguise, which flourished at the end of the sixteenth century and at the beginning of the seventeenth over all of Europe, at the time when Don Juan was about to be born.

Translated by Elaine P. Halperin.

1. For a treatment of the whole, see Gendarme de Bévotte, *La Légende de Don Juan* (Paris, 1906), and Micheline Sauvage, *Le Cas de Don Juan* (Paris, Seuil, 1953).

2. *La Littérature de l'Age baroque en France* (Paris, Corti, 1953).

What is the significance of this inconstancy? It is introduced in the form of two complementary aspects which a choice of texts will clarify:

I. In the course of his *Méditations sur le Psaume L*, Jean de Sponde defines man as a “changing Proteus,” for he consists of the water that flows, of glass, of wind, of all that breaks or flees: “I cannot resolder this glass, I cannot stem these torrents. This man, all of him, is made solely of the wind that comes and goes, that turns and returns, of the wind, indeed, that springs into whirlwinds, that whips his brain, that carries him off and transports him. . . .” And then Sponde asks himself: “. . . with what chains will I shackle this changing Proteus? How will I halt him?” And he marvels: “Whence so much fragility? Whence so much inconstancy?”

Sponde appears here as one of the first representatives of a current of Christian radicalism which, from Aubigné to Pascal, views man from the point of view of God, in other words, that of Essence and of Permanence; it is from this point of view that he defines him as inconstancy and instability; an inconstancy which is the sign of precariousness, of ontological sorrow because it is the shadow that God casts over the world. If man is this “changing Proteus,” it is because he is flight in the face of Essence; sin, the absence of God, is experienced here as transition and motion; and, inversely, motion and inconstancy constitute a mark of sin, tinged with black.

Sponde is not the only one to attest this black inconstancy. Agrippa d’Aubigné, so similar to him in many ways, also discovers inconstancy along his path, but only to reject and curse it: It is a “monster” born of the inferno, multicolored and multipede, its “secret wings” constituted by “a thousand weathercocks,” its face masked and often changing its mask. If he erects an altar to it, as Du Perron and Durant were to do, it is out of spite—the too-faithful heart in love with an inconstant woman:

Make a heart in love with no longer loving change.  
I will have an altar rolled up for you with a balloon. . . .

And this becomes the occasion for constructing edifices which baroque inconstancy never ceased to build, accumulating materials of the air, floating or whirling: dead leaves blown by the wind, air, weathercocks, plumes, flowers, the down of thistle, and finally “water and soap” with which it blew bubbles. The fact that in Aubigné there is defiance and censure which the game disguises all too poorly is confirmed by the 32nd Ode of the *Printemps*, which is still another “inconstancy.” This poet of weighty masses contradicts himself for a moment:

No, I do not like the weighty,  
But the light, the lustrous. . . .

And he embarks upon a eulogy of all that flies and seems to be unstable only to reverse it in the last strophe with a flip of the hand; it was merely a paradox, a courtyard game.

One could add to those of Sponde and Aubigné the names of others: a du Vair, the herald of Christian stoicism, or a Chassignet, the poet of Christian death, for whom our "transient days" like water, like the bubble and the shadow,

. . . pass more lightly  
Than does either soap, the flower, or the shade.

All of them welcome inconstancy and its changing images. They allow themselves to be caught up in it for a moment only to turn away from it, to tear themselves from it as from an eddy that might perilously sweep them away. They look upon man from the perspective in which Pascal was to see him. He, too, was to define man in terms of inconstancy and motion, in order the better to turn him, through appearances, from the reign of inconstancy, toward the immobile. "Nothing stops for us. This is the state that is natural to us and yet the most contrary to our inclinations. . . . Our reason is always disappointed by the inconstancy of appearances."

The spirits of this lineage see the world in its instability and in its unfolding, but with distaste. For them, inconstancy is the weight that pulls the world down; it is the movement of evil, for evil is identified with motion.

II. In the face of this black and heavy inconstancy, we now see another form of inconstancy which propels us toward Don Juan. This is a white and light inconstancy, linked to the first like the right and wrong side; after the Sponde-Pascal lineage, a "Montaignian" and Berninesque—and perhaps we might say in a broader way—a Jesuit lineage? Instead of growing angry, dismayed at human inconstancy, it became enchanted and intoxicated by it. Instead of clashing with inconstancy in an attempt to overcome or abolish it, this lineage was to revel in it, to expand and savor it, to derive joy and, at times, art from it—baroque art.

Marks of this white inconstancy abound on all sides. To mention only its poets, there was Du Perron who erected a *Temple à l'Inconstance*:

. . . Soft plumes will be its edifice  
And air, resting on the wings of wind. . . .

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There was also La Roque who, having invoked “the race of the old Proteus,” declares: “Not to stop save by moving.” In the first third of the seventeenth century there were Des Yveteaux, Frénicle, Gombauld and Lingende (who also appeals to Proteus), the romantic Etienne Durant who published the beautiful *Stances à l’Inconstance* in 1611 to that “vagabond Inconstancy,” soul of the universe, situated “everywhere and nowhere,” akin to water, to the flame, to wind, to shadow and to the very substance of our spirit:

- Our spirit is but wind, and like the wind, fickle.  
What it calls constancy is a restive impulse:  
What it thinks today tomorrow is but umbrage . . .  
Willingly would I paint my light thoughts,  
But now in thinking it my thought has changed,  
What I hold escapes me. . . .

And he terminates with the rough sketch of an imaginary temple made of the most fugitive materials:

The sands of the sea, the storms, the clouds,  
The fires which make a thundering heat of air,  
The flames of lightning rather dead than perceived,  
The paintings of the heavens to our unknown eyes. . . .

Along with Durant, the satyr-like Motin has the capacity to make us place our finger upon the close relationship which the poets concocted between amorous inconstancy and the general inconstancy which is the law of all things. The universe, like the mind, is only transitory, and he concludes, before he, too, resorts to Proteus, with:

The soul of the whole World is the only movement. . . .

The same relationship exists in the writings of his Provençal contemporary, Lortigue:

All things are mutable in the world . . .  
Everything moves  
One must love on the wing.

One senses the approach of Don Juan.

These are but a few examples, hastily chosen and selected only from among the French poets. But France was not isolated; Europe resounded with the same echoes.

Thus, an elegy by John Donne entitled *Variety* is a eulogy on change as

the basis of existence, a praise of the joy derived from diversity, from amorous plurality; praise which Donne as well begins by extolling the cosmology of motion:

The heavens rejoyce in motion, why should I  
Abjure my so much lov'd variety . . . ?  
Pleasure is none, if not diversifi'd. . . .

And what about Italy? What does Marino, who dominated and influenced all the poetry of his century, tell us? It is the same answer that he gives in *Rime*, entitled *Amore incostante*, and in the name of "Proteus of Love,"—the anticipated portrait of the metamorphosed man, Don Juan—some of whose traits are to be found again in Molière and in Da Ponte-Mozart:

He who wishes to see  
A new Proteus of love  
And a new chameleon  
Let him turn to me  
Who, changing my thought every hour  
Assumes a thousand different forms and colors. . . .<sup>3</sup>

Nothing limits nor imprisons his vagabond soul; all feminine forms are beautiful in his eyes, young, mature, brunette, blonde. This is already Leporello's "catalogue."

And what about Spain, where Don Juan was to be born? Augustinho da Crus adds his voice to those who continue the repetition and variation of the theme: "everything changes."

Everything changes, there is nothing that does not change.  
From instant to instant, I see only change  
And I, too, change from bad to worse. . . .

Often I bend over the brook  
Where upon the gravel I watch the water flow  
And see the shadow of the grass tremble. . . .<sup>4</sup>

3. Chi vuol veder, Marcello,  
Proteo d'Amor novello,  
Novel Camaleonte,  
A me giri la fronte,  
Ch'ognor pensier volgendo,  
Forme diverse e color varî apprendo.
4. Tudo se muda em fim, muda-se tudo,  
tudo vejo mudar cada momento:  
eu de mal em pior tambem me mudo. . . .

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And Gongora terminates a sonnet in which the life of man is an arrow, a shadow and an illusion with the words:

The hours pass, filing off the days,  
The days go, consuming the years.<sup>5</sup>

We must remark, in passing, that this very special feeling about time is expressed not only in terms of flight and of ebbing, but in newer and more precise images, implying the notion of a matter that becomes transformed, of a unity that expands and bursts because it is torn apart, as if gnashed by teeth, or fragmented into little units which an unceasing motion lifts up and tosses to the wind. This feeling of time moving and crumbling to dust is quite perceptible in the numerous poems of the marinists about the clock: the hour-glass, the water-clock, the mirror or wheel-clock, whose teeth bite into the days and split them, as, for example, in Congora's poem. We find it, too, in Lubrano's poem, the *Water-Clock*, where flux, both intermittent and continuous, divides our life into "tiny little drops of instants" (*minutissime goccioline d'istanti*) which make our "errant days like drops of time" (*Quasi stille del tempo i giorni erranti*).

This time made up of tiny drops, this time pulverized when one instant is separated from another, in a life of flux that one senses is entirely fugitive and illusory, is expressed by Etienne Durant:

The past is nothing any more, the future is a cloud,  
And what remains of the present he feels is fleeting.

This time that seems to burst into fragments is the time of inconstancy; it will become the time of Don Juan.

One could go on in this way, examining the poets of the period. But we have seen enough to realize that everywhere a large blanket of inconstancy and of instability appears which seems to evoke from all sides, in an irresistible gestation, the birth of the person entrusted to give it shape and individual life; the land is ripe for a new myth to spring up.

It was to appear for the first time in the theatre. Just as inconstancy, which is flight and pretense, is bound up with the baroque which unites motion and setting, so the theatre is the place as well as the agent of the baroque during the first half of the seventeenth century.

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Punha-me a ver correr as agoas frias  
por cima de alvos seixos repartidas,  
que faziam tremer hervas sombrias.

5. Las horas, que limando están los días,  
Los días, que royendo están los años.

In fact, the character of the inconstant man or woman abounds in this kind of theatre, in the pastoral or in the tragi-comedy. The prince of these inconstants is Hylas who comes from *Astraea*. He is widely represented in the dramatic pastoral and, in 1630, triumphs in Mareschal's play, *Inconstance d'Hylas*. He is the man with a hundred masks and a hundred hearts, who claims to be the "lover of all women" because he is the man of change, in love, as the John Donne of the *Elegy*, with diversity:

In these diversities my flame perseveres . . .  
Any mood displeases me which lasts too long.

A multiple and mobile me, ever fleeing from itself, therefore inclined toward any metamorphosis—such is the analysis of Hylas which is presented to us:

By disowning oneself, to transform oneself into all things  
'Tis merely this the inconstant does in order to love.

Love has become pure mobility because the substance of the being is metamorphosis.

In the beginning there was the Corisca of *Pastor fide*, the feminine Hylas, but more harsh, the rugged exponent of inconstancy as the means of dominating men and of safeguarding feminine freedom:

One must make use of lovers as one makes use of clothes;  
Have many, wear one and change often.<sup>6</sup>

"Change" incarnate in a Proteus-character is also Corneille's point of departure. All his comedies of the thirties were comedies of inconstancy, amorous fencing matches in which emotions were stirred up in all directions. Their heroes were the brothers of Mélite, his first heroine, who "loves change so much," or of Célidée who, in *Galérie du Palais*, confesses:

It is difficult for my heart to remain constant

her love being no more

than a light movement that disappears in less than a day.

But, before Dorante of the *Menteur*, the perfect characters of Corneillian "change" are the heroes of the *Place Royale*, Phylis and Alidor—principally Alidor, strange inconstant, not out of indifference but out of the

6. Far degli amanti, che delle vesti,  
Molti averne, un goderne, e cangiar spesso.

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fanatic will to be free; he is one of the sources of all Corneille's future plays.

All of this brings us well along the path that Don Juan was to take. But the inconstant is not yet Don Juan; he is merely the seeds of Don Juan. How was Don Juan to take root from these seeds that were disseminated everywhere? As always in such cases it depends upon the fortuitous: the invention of only one person, the creative stroke of a genius. This was to be the *Burlador* by Tirso de Molina.

In order to understand the genesis of the character we must remember that Tirso thought of his play as an edifying drama; more precisely as the illustration of a theological problem, related to those questions of grace, of free will, of predestination that were under discussion at that time. This intention is clarified by the juxtaposition of *Burlador* and another of Tirso's plays, *Le damné par manque de confiance*. These two plays are parallel and complementary, like the two wings of a diptych contrasting two symmetrical destinies, two identical solutions.

In the *Damn   par manque de confiance*, the hermit, Paul, obsessed by his own weakness, by the burden of eternal destiny, loses faith in divine forgiveness and from that moment on considers himself damned. And in reality he was to be damned because, despite a succession of warnings reminding him of God's mercy, he loses heart. Sinning against life, he "has doubts about grace" and dies an outcast. The last scene shows him as he reappears after his death, enveloped in the fires of hell, which was to be Don Juan's fate; he proclaims that he is damned and that he is the cause of his own misfortune:

I lacked confidence,  
I doubted God's grace . . .  
I damned myself,  
For I was small in faith.<sup>7</sup>

"I doubted God's grace . . ."—the anticipated image, or rather the caricature of the Jansenist, a Saint-Cyran before the advent of the Saint-Cyran who was to say: "Grace is rare. . ."

In contrast with the *Damn   par manque de confiance* (by fear of God and of his justice), Tirso's Don Juan is damned *because of excessive confidence*, because he is afraid of nothing, not even of God's judgment. He is uncon-

7. Pero fu  desconfiado  
De la gran piedad de Dios. . . .  
Y yo tambi n sea maldito,  
Pues que fu  desconfiado!



cerned about everything, even about eternity; he takes nothing to heart, not even man's fall or sin; he toys with life as he toys with the moment, the sole thing that fascinates him. Everything is a jest to him, the impulse which is aroused and which subsides into forgetfulness, the women he conquers along his way, as well as the warnings that bid him to consider his spiritual destiny, his death, the grace that might be lacking on that fateful day. To all these biddings he always answers: "I have plenty of time!" As he races along he hastens toward his destiny; having fallen into the trap, he would like to repent, to confess (which the later Don Juans were no longer to do); too late, he has forged his own damnation by his excessive optimism. Thus Don Juan, who believed himself saved no matter what, is in direct contrast to the hermit who believed himself inevitably to be an outcast—the criticism of Pelagius in contrast to that of Jansenism. Don Juan's confidence not only in grace but in his own power of life and endurance is such that he forgets the demands that eternity makes upon him. He goes even further and challenges eternity in the person of the dead Commander. This insult to the dead, which creates the drama and weights it in favor of the tragic, is an insult to the hereafter. And it is the Commander who assumes the responsibility of reminding him of the exigencies and terrible gravity of eternity, of the frailty of human endurance.

Thus Don Juan, conceived by his creator in a religious and theological perspective, born of man's clash with the hereafter, represents and was to represent always an essential relationship with the supernatural. The supernatural might possibly become laicized in destiny, as occurs in the recent *Don Juan* by Suzanne Lilar, but it cannot be banished. Don Juan would no longer be Don Juan were it not for this inherent relationship to his genesis; he would become another Hylas or Casanova.

The first Don Juan, born from the clash of the two inconstancies revealed for a moment in the baroque—the black and the white—the "Pascalian" baroque which condemns itself because it contradicts the profound needs of man and divine permanence, the "Montaignian" baroque which is pleased with itself because it coincides with the nature of the world of human time.

Both of these inconstancies are at work in Tirso's *Don Juan*. They encounter each other with violence, and it is this clash that produces the drama, symbolized by Don Juan's tragic clash with the Statue: the light against the heavy, the man of wind against the man of stone, time against permanence.

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On another level one could talk about a clash consisting in an antagonism between the hero and his creator, each representing one of the two inconstants, or more precisely, one of the points of view about inconstancy: Don Juan is the light inconstancy that absolves itself, and Tirso the inconstancy judged from the standpoint of permanence, and condemned.

Moreover, one constant in the Don Juans of the seventeenth century is that their authors are not their accomplices, in spite of their acceptance of inconstancy. They do not confuse themselves with Don Juan, even when they no longer acknowledge the point of view of permanence. Molière maintains a distance between himself and his Don Juan, even though this distance has decreased since Tirso. Although Don Juan shines with great power, and this he must do, yet he remains the Seducer and the Fascinator. In the seventeenth century everyone ends by condemning him, in harmony with the traditional end of the play. This is because, from the start, he is handicapped by the religious disapproval of Tirso, who was never to cease entirely to be the father of his creation. And when this disapproval diminishes in the course of the century, beginning with the Italian adaptations, other disapprobations replace it—that of society from which Don Juan has broken away, that of noble morality and the morality of honor which he defies by his contempt for honor, by his scandalous solitude.

On the other hand, Romanticism—and all of the modern period following it—upset the significance of the Don Juan as conceived by the baroque and, particularly, altered his relationship with his authors. The latter were to conceive of a Don Juan in their own image, their accomplice and their brother, a sorrowful and angelic brother. We were to see Hoffmann, Byron, Musset and Baudelaire confusing themselves with their Don Juans, and consequently glorifying and absolving him.

To return to Tirso and to the baroque, the initial Don Juan, then, appears to us as the incarnation of frivolous inconstancy and nothing more. He is mobility and flight made man; he is a man who cannot become attached to anything, who “stops only by moving,” to cite the phrase of a poet mentioned above. He is the Proteus-man because he springs from the nature of baroque time, this fluid, unstable, fragmented time.<sup>8</sup> He rejects every injunction of permanence because he is made up of scattered and multiple instants. And so he is a stranger to himself, to what he will be on the day of his death, in contact with eternity; this is also why he is without

8. I concur here to a certain extent with the central position of Micheline Sauvage's study; according to her, Don Juan can be understood only in the light of man's temporal condition; he is “the sinner who has chosen time in the place of eternity.”

memory and without hope: incapable of faithfulness because he is devoid of ties with the past, incapable of involvement because he is devoid of ties with the future. And if he loves no one, it is not out of selfishness or cruelty—at least in Tirso's works; it is because his loves can only be sudden flames since they cannot develop and endure in this fragmented time, composed of tiny drops, of errant specks, of instants in motion. His loves no more belong to him than any other of his acts and they cannot involve him; they are not even the abandoned proofs of a quest that was truly his own, as is true of some modern Don Juans. How could these loves be "sincere"? They can only represent pretense, masquerade or trickery.

There is nothing surprising about this if we recall that baroque metamorphosis and inconstancy are always linked with disguise, with play, with the dramatic presentation of a role, of a character portrayed and then shed like a garment. It is in this light that Don Juan appears to us from the very beginning of Tirso's work, and later in Mozart's: his face hidden by his cloak, his identity confused with that of Ottavio, Isabelle-Anna's fiancé, thanks to the dim light, and seducing her in this guise. His first gesture is to leave his own self and to assume the identity of another. Thereafter he has many adventures in the course of which he resorts to the same method. How little he must care about himself, it seems to us, to be willing to be loved as if he were someone else! This is a modern, a romantic reaction; in the baroque world the protagonist readily assumes his borrowed identities. He does this so well that he is no less himself in portraying each of the characters which successive moments suggest to him and he is unaware of the duration of time.

"And I have only disguised myself  
The better to make myself known,"

says a ballet dancer at the court of Louis XIII. Thus, through disguise, Don Juan realizes his own self. He is the man with a hundred masks, the perfect comedian, because he has no permanent self. In the opening scene where, from the very start, he appears masked, the first question that Isabelle asks him is one concerning his identity: "*Quien eres, hombre?*" ("Who are you?"). His answer, which is his very first remark in the play, is: "*Quien soy? Un hombre sin nombre*" ("Who am I? A man without a name"). For he has no self of his own, merely an infinity of interchangeable selves. A masquerader and a comedian, because he is always in flight and in the process of metamorphosis; in the baroque period, as we know, one does not exist without the other.

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We can see how much Tirso's Don Juan represents the core of the baroque if we realize that the baroque circles around the comparison of motion with immobility, of inconstancy with permanence, and also the contrast between being and seeming, with a strong tendency—among the Berninesques—to entirely acquiesce in motion, inconstancy and pretense, to the point of making of these a virtue and a state of perfection. And so the character portrayal of Don Juan is a privileged one, because he incarnates dramatically this fundamental dualism of the baroque, symbolized by the mysterious clash of the man of wind with the man of stone.

This exceptional privilege doubtless explains the magic career of Don Juan in the seventeenth century, until the time when Molière was to appropriate him, to give him a fresh impetus and launch him anew toward the future.

Is Don Juan a sheer accident and a kind of foreign body in Molière's works, as has often been claimed? Or, on the contrary, was Molière destined by nature to welcome this character that sprang from the baroque?

I will not attempt to label Molière as either baroque or classical. The interesting question is rather the following: starting from his vision, his style, and his characteristic dramatic forms, how did Molière behave with respect to suggestions concerning circumstances, in particular with respect to baroque situations, structures or characters?

Disguise and the mask represent one area of contact between Molière and the baroque. The dominant characteristic of Molière's work is the game of being and seeming, the juxtaposition of illusion and reality whose alternations constitute the rhythms and the framework of all of his plays. We have in mind the gift so well suited to the comedian and which all his heroes possess to such a great degree: that of entering into a role, into a character, either willingly or unwittingly, the gift of playing comedy either for oneself or for others.<sup>9</sup> From the *Cocu imaginaire* to the *Malade imaginaire* they are all "imaginary," virtuosos in the art of building and imposing illusion. They are all comedians, but some offer as real what they themselves believe to be real, whereas others offer what they want one to regard as real. The former are the dupes, the simpletons, the fanciful, the Don Quixotes; the latter are the cheats, the clever ones, the deliberate comedians, the Ulysseses.

The former see the world other than it is and believe themselves to be what they are not; captives of pretense, they project upon themselves their

9. Cf. the remarkable work of W. G. Moore, *Molière, A New Criticism* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1949).

power of illusion and become their own creations, but also their own dupes: Sganarelle believes he is deceived by his wife, Arnolphe considers himself to be Agnès's master, Jourdain thinks he is a man of quality, then a high Turkish dignitary, Argan thinks he is ill, etc. As for the latter, the deliberate comedians, the masked men who remain masters of their masks and of their power of illusion, presenting reality and themselves as other than they are—it is and it would well be the “knaves” who would condemn them if they stemmed from the common morality. In reality, it is to them that go all the glory and the prestige. They are the leaders of the game and the triumphant ones, because in Molière's universe, which is the universe of the stage, they are what is most lofty, most talented: perfect actors, incarnating the very virtue of the theatre, the genius of the mask, of play and of comic illusion; such are Mascarille, Sbrigani, Scapin, Covielle, Angélique Dandin, Mercure and all those lovers who make of themselves doctors, painters or major domos, to say nothing of Tartuffe who is a little different from them all.

To which of these two categories of masqueraders, the Jourdain and the Scapins, that people Molière's comedies does Don Juan belong? We see without a moment's hesitation that his place is waiting for him in the latter category, in the company of the frauds, the comedians who are not fooled by their own comedy, the masked ones who are masters of their masks.

But it is above all in the great works of Molière's middle years, works that are contemporary with *Don Juan*, that the affinities are the most obvious; with *Alceste*, whose engaging solitude he shares, a challenge hurled at the human species; with *Tartuffe*, whose double he becomes for a moment; with Jupiter in *Amphitryon*, the aristocrat and supreme adventurer,<sup>10</sup> Don Juan raised to celestial power, superior to any law save that of his own pleasure, and an unequalled virtuoso of inconstancy and of disguise. For Jupiter behaves no differently with Alcène than Don Juan does with Isabelle or Anna, seducing her in the guise of the husband whose features he is able to portray with a perfection that is his alone. And like Don Juan, Jupiter is the man with “a thousand hearts,” and like Don Juan and all of Molière's heroes he is the comedian, all the more magical and gifted since he is the comedian made God, the Proteus of great mythology. Nor is he an accident in Molière's work which, from this point of view, proves to be marvelously homogeneous.

10. See on this subject the excellent pages of P. Bénichou, *Morales du Grand Siècle* (Paris, NRF, 1948), p. 156 ff.

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Therefore Don Juan has a real place in the general trend of Molière's works: he bears a family resemblance and possesses close ties that bind him to the heroes that Molière likes to bring to life.

In spite of these affinities with Molière's universe, Don Juan nonetheless surpasses the usual limits and cuts a rather special figure there. This is because Molière accepts him with a nature and a destiny which he cannot modify as he chooses, certain features of which are ill-suited to the author's own themes. These themes are those of fixed, continuous, and rectilinear characters, mounted like mechanisms and exerting a comic influence upon the spectator, and conceived, moreover, outside of any reference to the hereafter.

To introduce Don Juan into this dramatic universe created a problem for Molière. What was he going to do with Don Juan? Was the hero or the author to yield ground? How was a counterfeit baroque character going to be handled in a universe that was, in part, alien to the baroque?

One look at the structure of the play will give us a clue. At first glance it does not resemble any other of Molière's plays: it is so truncated, spread out in time, fragmented into multiple central parts; it is sensitive to the influence of its origins, baroque tragi-comedy. And yet, in looking closer, we perceive that Molière has modified the structure of this play as compared with that of prior ones in order to relate it to his customary aesthetics. First of all, he tightens it by eliminating many important episodes—feminine conquests, the murder of the Commander, which he consigns to the past; then he builds firmly through the introduction of uninterrupted axes: the Don Juan-Sganarelle couple, the Don Juan-Elvire couple. For the first time Don Juan is given a wife, a single, permanent one, joined to his own destiny. Thanks to these and other means, Molière endows his play with unity, continuity and stability.

This handling of the play was to have an analogy in the handling of the hero. Everyone is struck by one distinctive feature of Molière's Don Juan: he was without women, or almost without them. There was only Elvire, but Elvire is the past, an inheritance from a Don Juan already dead; faced with Elvire, we see Don Juan not attacking, but fleeing like a coward. Confronted by Elvire, his pretenses betray embarrassment over his vanished identities; his distaste for Elvire is the repulsion he feels for everything that represents his internal continuity.

And so Molière eliminates women. He concedes only the first scenes of his play to the inconstant man, to the man of "ten thousand hearts." What he does is to strip his hero of the baroque, but only with one hand, because

with the other he plunges him back into it. He does away, for the most part, with inconstancy and mobility but he retains the mask, in conformity with the profound tendency of his play-writing; he gives the comedian, the virtuoso who acts a series of sketches, the best of it.

But there is another aspect that was to restore to Don Juan the complexity that he might have lost by the elimination of inconstancy: here a final feature intervenes, endowing him with his enigmatic halo, a feature that is the core of the Spanish genesis—his relationship with the hereafter. But this characteristic reaches Molière in a seriously altered condition and he does nothing to restore it to its initial stage: Don Juan has ceased to be a believer; he has lost his faith in Italy. Yet, vaguely true to the play's origins, he cannot forget heaven; but his relationship with it has been modified: from sheer indifference to the appeals of grace he has become an enemy of God whom he never ceases to defy and to ridicule. This relationship, persisting from Tirso to Molière, becomes degraded and its significance changes. Tirso's point of view was that of the Transcendent which illuminates man's inconstancy; this is not Molière's. We have seen the decline of inconstancy in his hero; on the other hand, the Heavens and the Statue possess a different value and no longer represent transcendence, but solely a superior and importunate grandeur, an intolerable sovereignty. Indifference has evolved into cynicism, extravagance into insolence; the son and heir who sows his wild oats has been transformed into an outlaw impatient of any dependency, whether it be social or religious. At the same time he has become a reasoning philosopher for whom "the heavens" and their manifestations represent an absurd joke, a scandal in the eyes of reason that also wants to be autonomous and sovereign.

As we can see, we have left the baroque and its fundamental dialectics on inconstancy and permanence; perhaps we have already entered upon the eighteenth century, of which this singular character, at times escaping from his author, would like to give us a foretaste.

But it is quite clear that if Molière's Don Juan represents merely an embryonic positivist and philosopher, ready to deny heaven and destiny some day, the playwright draws far away from the origins and from himself, to the extent of announcing Don Juan's suicide. And indeed the eighteenth century was to see an eclipse of Don Juan. Certainly it was to know the minor master and the rake, the Versac of Crebillon, Duclos's "professional lover," Lacos's libertine; but these are only degradations of Don Juan, just as Hylas was merely the preparation for him. No Don Juans in the eighteenth century, a period too indifferent to the supernatural, even in

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its laicized forms. But there is one exception: Mozart, at heart so little of the eighteenth century and yet so entirely the wonder of his times. Mozart recognizes Don Juan, all of Don Juan; he re-creates him miraculously, more real, more intense than he has ever been; he gives birth to him again and fires him anew with life and with a future, in advance of Romanticism which, thanks to him, was to rediscover Don Juan.

Does this mean that Romanticism and modern times retrieve the Don Juan that the baroque created? Certainly not. This new Don Juan, brother of Faust and sorrowful angel, this melancholy figure consumed with spleen (Baudelaire), this “profound soul” craving unity and the infinite (Hoffmann), this seeker of the ideal, this “despairing priest” in search of his God (Musset), this sincere man, capable of love and even of faithfulness, this modern Don Juan is a Don Juan so deeply altered that he is no longer the same.

And I must add that this is inevitable when a character born of the baroque passes over to Romanticism. To do so is like going over to the enemy, it is like changing planets, so greatly is Romanticism—in love with nudity and with internal continuity, nostalgic for unity and for the hidden self—different from the baroque, which is play, mobility, and disguise.