

Don Juan (1665)

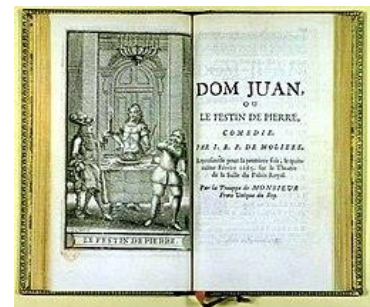
Jean-Baptiste "Molière" Poquelin (1622-1673)

OVERVIEW

Writer More frequently referred to by his stage name, Molière, Poquelin was a prominent figure of mid-1600s French theater and is still regarded as one of the greatest French wordsmiths of all time. He was born into a rich family, who called him "Le Nez" (Lit. 'The Nose') because of a maid's outcry at the moment of his birth. He lived in Paris and received his education at the Collège de Clermont (today, Lycée Louis-le-Grand). While studying to be a lawyer and follow in his father's footsteps as the "*valet de chambre ordinaire et tapissier du Roi*" ("valet of the King's chamber and keeper of carpets and upholstery"), Poquelin began his career as an actor under Madeleine Béjart. When her troupe went broke in 1645, ownership passed to Molière—in part due to his legal training—and he changed his name. Many suspect he did this to spare his father further embarrassment from having an actor in the family. His troupe would tour for over a decade, and he would write several noteworthy plays, which have been lost to time. It was in the late 1650s that Molière would become famous for his farces. English, Italian, and German nobles clamored for translations of his works, and it's through these translations that many of his plays survive to this day. He died after collapsing on stage in a coughing fit in February 1673, finally succumbing to a long-term tuberculosis infection.



Play Dom Juan ou le Festin de Pierre ("Don Juan or The Feast of Stone") was first performed by Molière's troupe in 1665. The play is not a fully original work, borrowing many elements (including the character Don Juan) from other Spanish plays, poems, and stories. This telling portrays Don Juan as a French atheist and rake (a man who takes part in habitual immoral conduct, typically as a political statement). Where in other versions Don Juan's valet or attendant is an admiring, pliable man, Molière's Sganarelle is a devout Catholic and foil to Don Juan. While many theatergoers enjoyed the play, the French government halted performances due to its themes and political subversion. This resulted in the 1682 publication of a heavily censored prose version of the play from which many surviving copies descend. Many contemporaries would tweak the context of the story to make it a story about the fate of those who mock religion, including Thomas Corneille.



MAIN CHARACTERS

Don Juan – The son of Don Louis and a noted rake in high society

Sganarelle – Don Juan's valet

Donna Elvira – Don Juan's wife

Dons Carlos & Alonse – Elvira's brothers

Don Louis – Don Juan's father

Charlotte – A peasant girl who has caught Don Juan's eye

Pierrot – A peasant man betrothed to Charlotte

The Commander's Statue – An animated statue of a man Don Juan killed in a duel

SYNOPSIS

This story is separated into five acts. We begin in a palace garden in Sicily, where Sganarelle and Gusman share snuff tobacco and discuss their masters. Gusman's mistress, Donna Elvira, has been concerned with her husband's sudden departure, and Sganarelle paints her husband, his master Don Juan, as a cruel and cynical man who no woman should ever trust. Don Juan enters and bickers with Sganarelle about his marriage and his new love: a peasant girl betrothed to a poor man. Donna Elvira appears to confront her new husband, but his cruel words leave her upset.

In the countryside, we see the object of Don Juan's desire, Charlotte, in conversation with her husband-to-be, Pierrot. He tells her of the time he saved Don Juan and his valet when their boat capsized. He leaves, and Don Juan appears with Sganarelle in tow. Don Juan is going through his typical seduction techniques when Pierrot returns and steps between them. Things escalate again when another woman Don Juan promised to marry appears and confronts him. Through some skillful speechcraft and manipulation, Don Juan weasels his way out of the situation, with everyone feeling as if they got their way. As he leaves, a messenger comes with a warning that a group of men are looking for Don Juan. Don Juan suggests he and his valet swap outfits, but Sganarelle refuses.

Sometime later we see Don Juan and Sganarelle in disguises, traveling through a forest. There, Don Juan meets and tempts a peasant to blaspheme, but the man refuses. After this, Sganarelle sees a man being robbed, and Don Juan jumps in with his sword to save him. The man turns out to be Don Carlos, his brother-in-law. Carlos tells Juan—who he does not recognize—that he and his brother Alonso are there to kill Don Juan for seducing their sister. Alonso arrives and recognizes Don Juan, but—feeling indebted—Carlos convinces him to postpone their revenge, and they leave together. Deep in the woods, Juan and Sganarelle encounter the tomb of a man who Juan recently killed. Juan invites the statue of the dead man to dinner, and the statue agrees.

Later that night, Don Juan sits down to dinner, but he is repeatedly interrupted by unexpected visitors. After the visitors have been shown out, Donna Elvira enters and attempts to convince Juan to stop his sinful behavior. He refuses, and she leaves. When at last Don Juan and Sganarelle sit to dine, the statue appears, but he does not join them. Instead, he invites them to dinner the following night.

In the countryside near the city, Don Juan claims to have repented to his father, and Don Luis leaves happily. Sganarelle is overjoyed as well, but Juan says he didn't mean it, talking at length about the nature of hypocrisy. Don Carlos appears, and Juan prepares to duel him. Suddenly, a specter of a woman appears, urging Don Juan to repent his sins, and again he refuses. The statue appears and takes Juan's hand, saying, "The wages of sin is death." Juan cries out that he is on fire. Lighting flashes and thunder crashes, and the ground opens up, swallowing Don Juan. Sganarelle sees that his master is no more and laments the loss of his income.

PLOT

Snuff and servanthood – Sganarelle, a valet, and Gusman, a horseman, stand in the garden of a place awaiting their masters. Sganarelle prepares some snuff while expounding upon the virtues of tobacco, and he talks for a long time about this before changing the subject to their masters. His master, Don Juan, has married Gusman's master, Donna Elvira, and Sganarelle fears the worst for their relationship. Gusman urges Sganarelle not to speak ill of his master, but Sganarelle knows his master's habits well and fears he doesn't care to break them. In this conversation, Gusman shows himself to believe in the noble caste system of the time, thinking the nobility are people of quality, but Sganarelle rightly points out that the nobility only think themselves above the commoners yet rarely act in such a fashion. After listening to Sganarelle speak on this topic for a while, Gusman leaves to attend to his duties.

Faith vs experience – Don Juan enters not long after Gusman leaves. He asks Sganarelle if he was talking to Gusman, and in a roundabout way, Sganarelle confirms he was. Don Juan then asks his valet about his thoughts on his marriage to Donna Elvira, and Sganarelle says he suspects his master has already found another woman to conquer. Don Juan confirms his suspicions, and Sganarelle begins to

react, but he stops himself. His master demands to hear his opinion, and the valet admits that he finds his master's habitual womanizing "deplorable." Don Juan responds with a long exposition on the nature of love and beauty. He believes himself like Alexander the Great in his ability to impact the world through conquering the hearts of women. "How you declaim!" Sganarelle replies. "You seem to have it memorized and speak just like a book." Don Juan asks for his response, and Sganarelle simply replies that his faith is his guide, but he should not be arguing with his master, and the Don agrees. Sganarelle says, while scandalous, his master's life is something he could learn to accept and even enjoy if only it didn't hurt anyone. They bicker about faith and carnal pursuits for a moment more before Don Juan spies his new bride from afar.

Donna Elvira – Donna Elvira enters, disappointed that her new husband didn't react to her sudden appearance as she had hoped, especially after he left so quickly on a day that was supposed to begin their honeymoon. Don Juan passes the buck, saying Sganarelle knows why he left before urging the servant to come up with an appropriate excuse. After some bickering, Sganarelle says Alexander and similar conquerors are their reason for leaving. Elvira insists her husband expand on this explanation, but before she begins, she mocks his manliness and demands to have his affection and attention. In his sly, roundabout way, Don Juan tries to claim he's going to make some religious repentance for a covenant broken, but Elvira sees through this and storms off after telling her husband that he'll be damned if he doesn't change his ways. Immediately after she leaves, Don Juan begins to discuss plans for his "next amorous enterprise," and Sganarelle laments that he must serve such a despicable master.

The betrothed – Two soon-to-be-weds walk along the seashore near the city, Charlotte and Pierrot. He tells her about how he saved a nobleman and his servant from drowning earlier that day. She laughs at his storytelling and the scenario, but she becomes interested in learning more about the nobleman, specifically his appearance. Pierrot laments that he feels Charlotte doesn't love him like he loves her. "But my pet," she says, "I do love you." "When it suits you," Pierrot quips back before complaining of her coldness. The complaint turns into a spat, which ends with Charlotte saying, "I love you as much as I can, and if you're not happy with that, you can always go love someone else." They see Don Juan and Sganarelle walking in the distance, and Pierrot confirms that he is the man he saved. "My God," says Charlotte, "He's handsome; it would have been a shame if he'd drowned." Frustrated and still tired from impromptu lifeguard duty, Pierrot wanders off to have a drink.

The next object of Juan's desire – Walking by the seaside, Don Juan complains about his plans to seduce another woman being interrupted by the squall that threw them into the ocean. Sganarelle is surprised that his master is more upset about not having already seduced another woman than nearly dying. Their conversation is interrupted when Don Juan notices Charlotte looking at them, asking, "Isn't she even more ravishing than the other one?" "Here we go again," sighs Sganarelle. Charlotte is obviously taken with Don Juan, and he turns on the charm, complimenting every part of her body. Charlotte plays coy, and Juan moves to kiss her hands, but she stops him, saying her hands are dirty from work. She also tells him she's soon to be wed to Pierrot. Don Juan laments that a beauty such as she should be condemned to the life of a peasant's wife. While still somewhat smitten, Charlotte is cautious, worried that Juan may be, as she calls it, a "great coxer" whose "chief concern is how to abuse girls." Juan declares his love, swearing to "pierce my heart a thousand times" if he even thinks of betraying her. Then he asks for her hand in marriage. He wants a kiss as proof of her acceptance, but she is unwilling until they are married. He accepts the lesser price of kissing her hand a thousand times, but they're interrupted.

Pierrot's return – Pierrot rushes in and stands between Charlotte and Don Juan, demanding the other man back off. "Who invited this yokel?" Don Juan says, giving Pierrot a shove. Pierrot identifies himself as Charlotte's betrothed, but the shoving continues. Charlotte tells Pierrot to stop, but he doesn't listen, telling Don Juan to go back home. The fight escalates with Don Juan beginning to slap and hit Pierrot, who calls the behavior a strange repayment for saving the Don from drowning. Charlotte steps in again, saying Don Juan wishes to marry her. Pierrot is gobsmacked as she tells him she'll give him good work delivering butter and cheese to her mansion. His anger overflows, and Don Juan moves to hit him again. A bit of comedy unfolds as the two men circle around Charlotte, each extolling the virtues of their own

bravery while using a woman as a sort of human shield. With Sganarelle adding in his own insults, Pierrot rushes off to tell Charlotte's family what is happening.

Another lover appears – With Pierrot gone, Sganarelle is shocked to notice another woman approaching: Mathurine, another woman Don Juan has promised to marry. Mathurine sees him with Charlotte and asks if he's making romantic advances toward Charlotte, who is from her village. Thinking quickly and whispering in each of their ears in turn, Don Juan convinces each woman that the other is out of her mind and she is the object of his desire. After he leaves, they bicker with each other about who Don Juan is to marry, and Sganarelle tries—in vain—to warn the women of his master's machinations. Don Juan is about to respond to his servant's statements when another man rides up with a warning for Don Juan: A dozen men on horseback are hunting for him. Don Juan suggests that he and Sganarelle swap clothes, but his valet insists he must be joking.

In the woods – Amid the trees, we see Don Juan dressed as a commoner and Sganarelle dressed as a doctor. Sganarelle comments that he likes these disguises better than Don Juan's plan of simply swapping clothes, but Don Juan complains about his costume and insults Sganarelle's. Sganarelle talks about how people treat him differently now, mentioning a handful of peasants who have approached him for medical remedies. Don Juan launches into a short tirade about the senselessness of the medical sciences, calling the field "one of the greatest errors entertained by men." The conversation soon turns to Don Juan's atheism: just like with medicine, he believes in neither heaven nor hell. When asked what he *does* believe in, Don Juan answers, "I believe that two and two makes four, Sganarelle, and that four and four makes eight." Sganarelle mocks his master, saying it's insane to think that mathematics created the world and all the things in it, as only God has such power.

A beggar – While wandering the woods, Don Juan and Sganarelle encounter a beggar. Sganarelle asks for directions to the city, and the beggar provides them as well as a warning about some bandits that have been attacking people just up the road. Don Juan thanks him but begins to insult the man when he asks for alms. His mockery increases when he learns that the beggar is a religious hermit who spends his days in prayer. After a bit of mockery, Don Juan offers the man a gold coin, but only if he will say something blasphemous. The beggar pleads for mercy before refusing to commit such a sin, and Don Juan walks away with a final smug comment about the senselessness of faith.

A traveler besieged – Deeper into the woods, Sganarelle frets for his master's safety as he approaches the foretold bandits with sword in hand. They scatter, frightened by the appearance of another armed man. In their wake, the man they were trying to rob introduces himself as Don Carlos, one of Donna Elvira's brothers. Don Carlos laments that the bandits killed his horse and have separated him from his brother. He tells the duo of he and his brother's quest to avenge their sister's marriage to an unfaithful man: Don Juan. Disguised and unrecognized, Don Juan pretends to be a friend of Don Juan and speaks in the man's defense, swearing to help Don Carlos find him if he and his brother will only stop their search. Carlos laments his situation: he is honor-bound to kill Don Juan yet owes his life to one of the man's friends.

Don Alonso appears – Followed by three servants, Don Alonso appears on horseback. Dismounting and barking orders, he quickly moves to his brother and is shocked to see Don Juan standing beside him. "What am I seeing?" he asks, hand on his sword. "My brother, you are here with our mortal enemy!" Don Juan springs backwards and grips his own sword as he admits who he is. "Traitor!" shouts Alonso, raising his sword. "You must die!" Don Carlos steps between them, saying he owes his life to Don Juan. Alonso reminds his brother of their duty, but Carlos is firm, saying he must repay in turn Don Juan for his life by giving him a chance to leave unharmed. "To recoil is to hazard our chance for sure vengeance," Alonso says, demanding they attack Don Juan now before raising his sword. Carlos stops him, putting himself between Juan and his brother again, saying, "To deal him your mortal blows, you will have to pierce me." After much drama and convincing, Don Alonso lowers his sword and leaves with his brother. As he leaves, Don Carlos reminds Don Juan that this is only a temporary truce. The next time they meet, there will be blood.

Lord Commander's grave – With the brothers Alonso and Carlos gone, Don Juan and Sganarelle continue their walk into the woods. "Why did you run when they attacked me?" Don Juan asks his valet. He claims to have been picking a rare medicinal herb when Alonso rode up. After discussing who the men were, Sganarelle suggests that Don Juan could simply apologize and make peace, but Don Juan is too busy plotting his next amorous adventure. They're surprised to find an ornate tomb in the woods, and Sganarelle remembers that a man Don Juan killed in a duel ordered it built. The Lord Commander is never named, but his large tomb with its impressive statue speaks volumes about his wealth and power. After walking the grounds, Don Juan asks the statue to dine with him as a joke. To our surprise, the statue nods in agreement, though only Sganarelle sees it.

Dinner interrupted – In Don Juan's home, he sits down to dine. Sganarelle insists that the statue nodded and made the sign of the cross, but Don Juan says it's just a trick of the light. Before they can begin to eat, the man who warned Don Juan about his pursuers enters the room with more news: "Your provisioner is here to and asks to speak with you." Sganarelle and Don Juan attempt to blow him off for a minute, but eventually they call him up. Dimanache, the provisioner, enters after waiting for hours and politely addresses Don Juan. Don Juan makes a show of welcoming him, calling for a chair and a new table setting, though Dimanache refuses. Every time he tries to explain the reason for his visit, Don Juan interrupts him with yet another request, nicety, or show of generosity, and Dimanache can't get a word in edgewise. Eventually, Don Juan excuses himself, saying he's going to make plans for security on Dimanache's upcoming journey, offering to lead the expedition at his side. Sganarelle is left in the dining room with the provisioner. They quickly come to bickering about unpaid debts, and Sganarelle pulls Dimanache by the arm toward the door to get him to leave.

Don Louis – Sometime later, the messenger from before enters to proclaim the arrival of Don Juan's father, Don Louis. "Just the visit to put me in a fine mood," quips Juan. Already in the room, Don Louis launches into a long speech about his son's ungrateful and self-centered ways. Don Juan invites his father to sit and continue speaking, but Don Louis refuses, saying, "No, malapert, I do not wish to sit, or even speak any more, and it is clear that all my words have not the least effect on your soul. But know, unworthy son, that your actions have pushed paternal tenderness to the limit..." He leaves after saying he'll disown him to "wash away the shame of having brought [Don Juan] into the world." After his father is out of earshot, Don Juan quips, "And die as quickly as you can. It's the least you can do." Sganarelle can't just sit idly by and watch a father be treated in such a way by his son. "Is my dinner ready yet?" Don Juan asks.

Donna Elvira's plea – Sometime later, Don Juan is surprised to receive a woman in a veil. She lifts her veil, revealing herself to be his wife, Donna Elvira. She says she's overcome her anger and visits him because she's worried about his immortal soul. Sganarelle weeps at the beauty of her words, Don Juan chiding his valet for this. Elvira urges Juan to repent and change his ways, saying she doesn't love him in a worldly sense, but in a heavenly one, she can't not love him and wishes for him to avoid an eternity in hell: "Juan, I ask you with tears, and if the tears of a person you once loved are not enough, I beg you to do this by whatever is most able to touch you." Juan asks her to stay, but she refuses, asking him to take her advice.

An (un)expected visitor – We see Don Juan preparing to dine later that evening. He discusses Donna Elvira's advice with Sganarelle, saying her words made him feel some small emotion, but one so minuscule he simply ignored it. Sganarelle is frustrated that her loving display had no effect on him, but the valet is hungry and says nothing further. Don Juan surprises his servant by saying that he should "think about amending [his] ways." As they start to eat, Don Juan notices Sganarelle smiling and jokes that he must be breaking out in boils because of the size of his dimples. There comes a knock on the door, and Sganarelle goes to answer. He comes back shaken, saying the statue of the Lord Commander is outside. Not believing him, Don Juan goes to answer the door himself. He begins mocking Sganarelle for being afraid, but the statue interrupts him eventually, saying, "I invite you to come dine with me tomorrow. Are you brave enough for it?" Don Juan says he'll come and asks Sganarelle to give the statue a torch to light his way home. "One has no need of light," says the statue, "when one is led by Heaven."

A change of heart – In a field outside the city, Don Juan, Don Louis, and Sganarelle walk together. Don Louis is surprised to hear his son repenting his ways. The audience can clearly hear and see, however, that he is being hypocritical when he says, “I have escaped from all my errors: the man you see is no longer the same as last night, and the sudden change that Heaven has made in me will surprise all the world.” Don Louis rejoices upon hearing his son repent his womanizing and atheism. Giving thanks to heaven for this sudden change of heart, Don Louis walks away to tell Don Juan’s mother the news. Once they are alone, Sganarelle celebrates his master’s conversion. “Fool that you are!” Don Juan quips. “You take what I just said for good money, and believe that my mouth was in accord with my heart?” Sganarelle remarks that it’s strange the talking statue did nothing to change Don Juan’s mind about the power of spiritual things, showing his disappointment clearly. “There’s no longer any shame in it,” Don Juan says about his behavior and beliefs. “Hypocrisy is a fashionable vice, and all fashionable vices pass for virtues.” After speaking on this for a while, Sganarelle responds with the fact that his master’s actions are evil and he will be damned for them. Don Juan complements his debating skills, ending the conversation.

A life-debt paid, a duel inevitable – Don Carlos appears, calling for a truce to discuss how they can resolve their feud without bloodshed. Adopting his hypocritical tone once more, Don Juan responds that he cannot fight because “Heaven directly opposes it.” Don Carlos responds that Juan’s sudden conversion changes neither the law, his sin, nor the insult committed: he must return to Donna Elvira or face her brothers’ blades. Don Juan says she’s taken to a convent, nullifying their marriage. Carlos stands firm. Don Juan tries again to talk his way out of the fight, but Don Carlos won’t budge, saying, “Do you think you can dazzle us with these vain excuses?” Don Juan stops budging as well, simply repeating that his inaction is the order of Heaven. His suspicions confirmed, Don Carlos warns Don Juan that he will soon take his revenge, and he leaves. As Don Juan and his valet walk toward the forest, Sganarelle comments on how horrendous his new hypocrisy is. Don Juan comments that if Heaven wishes him to hear its advice, “it should speak more clearly.”

A spirit – As they enter the woods, a voice speaks: “Don Juan does not have more than a moment to benefit from the mercy of Heaven; and if he does not repent now, his perdition is certain.” The shape of a woman with a veil passes behind Don Juan and Sganarelle. The valet says it’s a ghost, but Don Juan doesn’t believe him. Suddenly, the ghost changes shape, adopting the visage of the Grim Reaper. Don Juan draws his sword and rushes the spirit, but it disappears before he can hit it.

Dinner with the statue – Entering the clearing where the Lord Commander’s statue stands, Don Juan and Sganarelle hear it speak: “Halt, Don Juan. Yesterday, you gave your word you’d dine with me.” “Yes,” says Don Juan, “where to?” The statue extends his hand, and Don Juan takes it. Suddenly, the nobleman is struck by a great pain as lightning strikes and opens up the ground beneath him. The statue and Don Juan plummet into the fiery hole, and Sganarelle sinks to the ground, wailing. “My pay! My pay!” he laments, with only a short comment about the righteousness of his master’s death.

CHARACTERS

Don Juan

Don Juan is a nobleman living in Venice. With the help of his valet, Sganarelle, he lives his life as he and only he sees fit. Don Juan’s desires often run counter to familial expectations, the culture and religion of the time, and common decency.

Vain We see Don Juan’s vanity nearly constantly. He thinks he is the axis upon which the world turns. He also believes that all women are his to have, though the behavior of the women we see in this play doesn’t do much to dissuade him from that belief. It’s his vanity that drives his more selfish and irreverent traits because he believes himself to be smarter and overall better than everyone he meets.

Selfish Don Juan is nothing if not selfish. Most of his actions have to do with him getting what he wants no matter who is hurt. His first appearance sees him forsaking his marriage of just one day to go and pursue a peasant girl. He threatens to fight and kill Pierrot after the peasant steps between him and Charlotte, all

because he is entitled to less punitive risk as a noble and he wants to sleep with Pierrot's betrothed. After his father threatens to disown him for his irreverent behavior, Don Juan pretends to have had a change of heart and "repents" to his father. Sganarelle celebrates this after Don Louis leaves, but Don Juan mocks him for believing his ruse. Another comic moment of Don Juan's selfishness comes up when he asks Sganarelle to swap clothes with him after being warned that men are pursuing him. He doesn't care what happens to his servant so long as he is alive.

Irreverent Don Juan finds nothing sacred, and he finds those who show reverence stupid. He is a contrarian by nature and a glutton for pleasure. When people try to give him moral guidance, he often mocks them to their face. Even when he's hiding his mockery or true intent, he often misinterprets or twists pious ideals to get his way. It's his lack of reverence that creates most of the drama and the moral tales in this story, as well as what sets him apart from Sganarelle, his narrative foil.

Sganarelle

In spite of his pious nature, Sganarelle serves Don Juan dutifully. If his final words in the play are to be taken seriously, Don Juan pays him extremely well, and this is his prime motivation for serving the irreverent and cruel man. Sganarelle is the complete opposite of his master in most ways.

Pious Piety is one of Sganarelle's main traits and what sets him apart from his irreverent master. In Sganarelle's mind, faith is the first thing all people should be concerned with, though he does fail to live up to this standard himself. Frequently he gives thanks to God or makes the sign of the cross to ward away what he feels is evil. His version of piety may seem strange to us, as he sees the spirit in the woods and the animated statue of the commander as extensions of God despite their animistic nature, which runs counter to pious Catholic belief. At the time this play was written, these kinds of spirits were believed not only to be real but also to be either tests from God or his actors in the living world.

Complainer Sganarelle most often opposes his master through complaint. Don Juan often asks him to lie and mislead others, going against Sganarelle's moral compass, and Sganarelle makes it known often that he is uncomfortable or upset doing so. Despite his complaints, Sganarelle frequently does as he's told without too much deviation from his duties as a servant. Although several times we do see him sarcastically hint to one of Don Juan's victims that his master is being less than sincere. Sganarelle is given the final lines in the play, and he uses these to complain about the loss of his pay.

Submissive While he complains often and is frequently at odds with his master, Sganarelle is incredibly submissive. He may balk at some of the orders Don Juan gives him, but he always obeys, even when it goes against his personal faith and morals. He does this specifically because Don Juan compensates him extremely well for his services, as seen by his lamentations at the end of the play: Sganarelle isn't really concerned with the death of his master so much as the end of his pay. In Sganarelle's submissiveness, we see the fickle nature of those with weak moral spines who can be swayed by money. Sganarelle could simply give up the job, but his desire to live comfortably overrides what is otherwise a pious personality and belief system.

Donna Elvira

At the beginning of the play, we learn that Donna Elvira has just been married to Don Juan. He leaves shortly after their nuptials, and she tries to track him down and find out why. Much to her dismay, she finds that Don Juan has already lost interest in her and is seeking out a new lover.

Pious We see Donna Elvira's piety clearly in her final appearance. When she first appears, God and her faith are on her mind, but almost entirely in the context of what she hopes to be a long and happy marriage with Don Juan. Her coming to terms with his abandonment is the focus of that conversation. Their last conversation, however, clearly shows the depth of her faith. While most women would have a strong reaction to being abandoned by a newlywed spouse, Elvira is calm and collected, loving even. She tells Don Juan that her faith tells her to forgive Don Juan's sinful nature while warning him to change his

ways or face damnation. She leaves after giving her forgiveness and repeating the warning, concerned more with his immortal soul than her own happiness. Donna Elvira is bound for a convent to nullify their marriage and spare them both scandalous embarrassment. Even when avoiding scandal, she does so in the most pious way, hoping to spare Don Juan's life and give him a chance at redemption.

Forgiving While she is obviously hurt by Don Juan's love games, Donna Elvira is incredibly forgiving. Informed by her faith, she approaches Don Juan toward the end of the play and warns him that he must change his ways or face damnation. She says that she doesn't begrudge him his actions, even as she prepares to enter a convent to nullify their marriage. But she does restate her warning, saying that it is her duty as a Christian to preserve his immortal soul and protect him from the flames of Hell. She remains calm and caring even as Don Juan mocks her concerns and forgiveness, showing the

THEMES

Society

Class As are many surviving plays and stories of the time, *Don Juan* is a tale of the wealthy and powerful. Don Juan and Elvira are nobles, and they want for nothing with a troop of servants ready to bend to their every whim. The servants sometimes have a say, especially Sganarelle, but he's the only one with anything negative to say about the nobility, specifically his master's evil tendencies. Don Juan uses his class to manipulate women, as seen when he woos Charlotte and convinces her it's in her best interest to marry him—specifically for his wealth—in just a few sentences.

Religion Christian faith is a constant motif used in the play. While Molière wanted to critique the ideas of nobility and piety in the early 1600s, many translations and censored editions twist this into a much more Christian moral tale, warning the viewer of the fate awaiting those who are irreverent and irreligious. The good characters in all tellings seek to bring Don Juan back into the fold, as it were, as it's his rejection of Christian morality that is core to his personality. He often takes joy in attempting to get people, such as the beggar in the woods, to blaspheme. This refusal to live by the broadly accepted morality of the time is meant to critique the idea that people are born into nobility as opposed to noble acts being a choice.

Justice

Revenge Vengeance takes a few shapes in *Don Juan*. There is the immediate, childish personal vengeance Juan gets when he turns Elvira's words back around on her, insulting her pious plea that he change his ways. There is also the childish slap fighting that happens when Pierrot tries to separate Don Juan and Charlotte, as Juan is protected by his nobility, and Pierrot can't do anything but take the slaps. We see more serious vengeance from Elvira's brothers, though they're not able to act on their desire to avenge their sister's honor during the course of the play. Heaven itself has some vengeance at the very end of the film when the statue drags Don Juan down to hell.

Violence Violence appears mostly in the past tense in *Don Juan*. While Elvira's brothers seek to hunt down Don Juan, they never actually come to blows in spite of the threats made. Don Juan does smack around Pierrot a little, but this is a very short and comedic moment. The most shocking violence appears in Don Juan's past, revealed in the woods when Sganarelle recalls that a man Juan killed in a duel's mausoleum lies nearby. Juan is happy to gloat at the man's grave. While he mostly seeks to avoid violence throughout the play, Juan is shown to be a bit bloodthirsty by his treatment of a dead rival.

Relationship

Love Earthly love is rarely seen in *Don Juan*. Perhaps Sganarelle has some love for his master in order to follow him as he does, but it's the loss of his pay he laments most when his master dies. Donna Elvira seems to love Don Juan, but most of the evidence for this comes before the play even begins. What love we do see mostly takes the shape of faith. Both Sganarelle and Elvira attempt to make Don Juan forego his sinful ways because of their heavenly love for their fellow man. This is the love that gets the most

positive representation, even if the moments we see it in are fleeting. We also see broken hearts. Both Elvira's and Pierrot's hearts are broken by Don Juan's activities. Elvira was expecting to have a husband the night after their nuptials, and Pierrot is forsaken by the woman he was about to marry when she decides she'd be better off with an attractive nobleman rather than a peasant like Pierrot.

Attraction We see attraction come up several times through the play, though the most important moment comes when Charlotte first sees Don Juan. She is walking and talking with her betrothed, Pierrot, and he tells her of a nobleman he rescued from drowning earlier that day. She is instantly curious about what the man looked like and is elated when Pierrot confirms that Don Juan is the man of whom he spoke. Charlotte speaks openly about being attracted to Don Juan, frustrating Pierrot, who leaves to get a drink. When Don Juan approaches, he stops to speak his attraction for Charlotte to his valet. This exchange is purely aesthetic: neither knows the other, nor are they that interested in getting to know each other, as Charlotte quickly agrees to marry Don Juan with only a little bit of hemming and hawing. Because of her attraction to Don Juan (and his money), Charlotte forsakes Pierrot, breaking his heart.

Service We see this mostly through Sganarelle, though servants are almost always on stage with the other noble characters. These people help nobles with their horses, run messages, prepare meals, and other menial tasks, and most with lines about it have only praise for their masters. This is what sets Sganarelle apart: not only does he complain, his master is the only noble we see who isn't guided by faith and compassion. We quickly come to see that Sganarelle isn't lying when he describes his master as "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 or Hell..." But despite seeing and even aiding Don Juan's repugnant behavior, Sganarelle continues to serve, mostly for the coin. It's the loss of his pay he laments losing when Hell swallows up his master.

Womanizing Don Juan is almost single-minded in his focus on finding another "amorous adventure." He uses marriage proposals to bend women to his will, showing us just how much he values the idea when he abandons his new wife in order to seek out new sexual conquests after just one night together. We see this theme most clearly when he approaches Charlotte and convinces her to marry him in just a few short exchanges. Don Juan's womanizing is so obvious and widespread that even dutiful Sganarelle does nothing to deflect or minimize rumors about his master.

Multiple partners In this version of *Don Juan*, the theme of multiple partners arises to show what a fickle and uncaring man Don Juan is. It's not even a full day into his marriage with Donna Elvira when he abandons her to find a new fling. When he meets and begins wooing Charlotte, he is soon interrupted by another woman he promised to marry. In spite of the chaos, Don Juan is able to talk his way out of the situation while leaving both women believing he's going to return to marry them. It's clear that Juan values novelty in romance and the conquest of bending women to his will above just the sexual act. His irreverence for polite society seems to be the major determining act for his desire for multiple partners.

Marriage There is little positive representation of marriage in *Don Juan*. Donna Elvira and Don Juan have barely been married a day, and already Juan is running off to find a new lover. It's clear from the get-go that Don Juan refuses to accept the sanctity of his marriage vows, and it becomes more clear as we see him pledge marriage to Charlotte after speaking to her for only a few minutes only to be interrupted by another woman he promised to marry. Juan's treatment of marriage as a tool to get what he desires clearly marks him as a rake (a person who relishes immoral behavior) and was part of why his place as the protagonist in the story was so shocking and scandalous for the time.

Romance We see the 1600s idea of romance clearly during Don Juan's exchange with Charlotte. Juan speaks at length about her beauty and his desire to be near her. While he presents ways in which he could devote himself to her beauty, she talks him down from kisses on the lips and cheeks to kisses on her hand. This is all based on surface-level traits like Charlotte being Don Juan's type and Juan being a nobleman. Molière seems to be critiquing this idea, and his critiques become most clear when Pierrot—Charlotte's betrothed—returns and steps in between her and Don Juan. He pleads with Charlotte to stop what she is doing, but she responds in a business-like tone, saying getting married to Juan is a big opportunity for her, even telling Pierrot that she'll hire him as a provisioner and give him lots of money.

The rapid-paced, thoughtless, transactional nature of romance at the time (especially what survives in plays and novels) is clear to modern readers, but such a portrayal would have been especially shocking at a time when noble birth implied someone was superhuman and incapable of evil.

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ETHICS

Deception While deception is employed by Don Juan often throughout the play, it has some of its most impactful moments in the realm of sexuality. Juan is more than happy to trick girls into marrying him, and we see this through his treatment of Donna Elvira, who wonders why Juan is leaving their new home so quickly on the morning after their wedding. She comes to the correct conclusion—in spite of Juan’s many attempts to convince her otherwise—that their marriage is a sham and Don Juan intends to move on to another lover. Juan then deceives Charlotte and another woman into believing he’s going to marry them, causing Charlotte to abandon her fiancé Pierrot when she begins to consider the economic prospects of a peasant marrying a nobleman. While Juan employs deception in the latter half of the play, most of this is played off for comic or moral effect as he hypocritically pretends to have renewed his Christian faith. Even if it’s less impactful, it helps make clear that Juan uses deceit for his own gain, be that access to his father’s wealth or to the bedchambers of beautiful women.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does this play portray masculinity?
2. What was Molière saying about the rising secularism of his time?
3. In what ways does *Don Juan* challenge the idea of the nobility's ability to rule by divine right?
4. Molière was attempting to make a "comedy of manners." Does this intent survive translation, or has it become only a moral tale about the fate of irreligious people?