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***Don Juan in Catalan Theater***  
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## DON JUAN IN CATALAN THEATER

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The character and myth of Don Juan have been included in the theatrical repertoire of virtually all literatures. Catalan literature has paid great tribute to them. Considering the size of modern Catalan literature, Don Juan is represented rather generously.

A great number of Catalan authors and works are included in Armand E. Singer's extensive bibliography on Don Juan.<sup>1</sup> All of them pertain to Catalan literature after the "Renaixença", that is, after the middle of the last century.

As with many Spanish Don Juans of the last century, the Catalan ones emerged primarily as parodies of *Don Juan Tenorio* by the Castilian writer José Zorrilla. This play was constantly the target of mockery, not only from other writers, but also from the author himself, who was never satisfied with his creation nor with the unexpected popularity it attained.

The title of most of the Don Juan plays in Catalan (generally of one act only) reflect this satirical or parodic intention: *Les desgràcies del Tenorio* (Barcelona, 1903) by Lluís Millà i Gacio, who wrote also *Tenorio a trossos* (Barcelona, 1900); *Les conquestes del Tenorio*, "apropòsit en un acte", by Josep Alcaraz (València, 1917); *Tenorio a la força*, by Arturo Casinos i Moltó (València, 1928); *La fi de Don Juan*, by Josep Puig i Pujades (Sabadell, 1930).

Some of these plays have not been published: *Un èmul de Don Juan*, "monòleg en vers", by Teodoro Argelés; *Don Joanico*, by

<sup>1</sup> Armand E. Singer, *The Don Juan Theme. Versions and Criticism: A Bibliography*, Morgantown, West Va. Univ., 1965.

Jaume Llopart i Munné, and *Tenorios d'estiu*, by Angel Rius i Vidal.

Occasionally Don Juan became a regional character, located in a particular and quite provincial city. Consider the four-act farce *Don Joan de Terrassa*, by Josep Navarro i Costabella, written and performed in 1935, and the one-act play *Lo Tenorio de Sant Just*, by Pau Rodon i Amigó.

The lyrical play *Don Juanito*, by Josep Verdú i Feliu, was published in 1885. This extensive work is actually a socio-political satire in which Don Juan is portrayed as a rebel student and a freedom lover. In order to escape from the police, he dresses as a woman and goes by the name of Margarida, a name which echoes Goethe's *Faust*. The play is somewhat chaotic, and Don Juan, that is, "Don Juanito", is really a rogue with few of the characteristics of the traditional Tenorio.

Two works of the Spanish Plays Collection of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., are not included in the otherwise exhaustive bibliography by Armand E. Singer:<sup>2</sup> *Don Juan Barrila*, "paròdia en un acte, dividit en sis quadros", by Anton Pané i Galan, not dated, but, according to the orthography, probably written prior to 1924, and *En Joanet i en Lluiset*, by Sanall i Serra (Barcelona, 1884).

The action of the first one takes place in the Barcelona harbor, known as "l'Hòstia", possibly an irreverent allusion to the sacred host. The "dramatis personae" are the most representative of Zorrilla's *Tenorio*. The protagonist carries the nickname of "barrila", that is, he who constantly schemes. Unlike in Tirso de Molina's *El burlador*, there are no female characters except for one "drapaire", a rag lady, who partially plays the role of Doña Inés. The play includes the popular encounter between Don Juan and

<sup>2</sup> We acknowledge the generous help of Dr. Everette E. Larson, Area Librarian at the Library of Congress, in identifying these plays.

Don Luis and the mutual threats and trickeries in order to win the old bet; the love scene between Don Juan and the inebriated "drapeire"; Don Juan's effort to win Ignès' favor (offstage); the accidental death of her father; the revenge of her brother who mortally wounds Don Juan, and the scene at the cemetery. This final scene, although extremely brief, shows Joan Barrila confessing his deep love to Ignès, and dying after a quick monologue, without repentance. This is an absurd play which probably delighted the audience with the many references to Zorrilla's *Tenorio*.

A shorter play, but better accomplished, is the one by Sanall i Serra, *En Joanet i en Lluïset*. This play has a cast of only four characters: Ignès, Joanet, Lluïset, and the "Emblanquinador", a whitewasher. The purpose here is also to satirize and this is accomplished rather well. Following very closely Zorrilla's verses, it presents only Don Juan's encounter with Don Luis and the famous love declaration next to the Guadalquivir river. Here, however, Doña Inés is the wife of a whitewasher, who, in discovering Don Juan's advances towards her, intends to give him a good beating. Joanet manages to escape kneeling at the feet of the enraged husband and begging his forgiveness. All of this takes place amid the laughter of his rival, Lluïset, who has been watching the events.

Undoubtedly, all these plays have the sole purpose of taking advantage of the best known scenes and lines of Zorrilla's Don Juan: his long list of love affairs and his never ending love declarations. None of them attempted a deep analysis of the theme nor to present an original approach. As in many of the Don Juan short plays, whether in Castilian or other languages, the aim was to entertain an audience which, at least in Spain, knew beforehand about the affairs of the *Tenorio* of Seville; to entertain an audience which enjoyed and even knew by heart his long lines of easy verses.

Let us see a fragment of the parody *En Joanet i en Lluïset*. Joa-



net, in addressing Ignès, who happens to be a maid at Serafina's house, recites:<sup>3</sup>

iAh! ¿No es cert, angel d'amor  
 que a casa Serafina  
 ni la mestressa et rondina  
 ni t'inquieta el senyor?  
 Aquesta aura que va plena  
 dels perfums de les cassoles  
 dels dinars i merendoles  
 que hi fa gent de tota mena;  
 l'aigua tan fresca i serena  
 d'aqueixa font del Lleó  
 que si tingués expressió  
 Déu sap el què explicaria;  
 ¿No és veritat, coloma mia,  
 que t'estan fent il·lusió?

In Pané i Galan's *Don Juan Barrila* the parody of this same scene of Zorrilla is even coarser, with its popular lines in Castilian intermingling with new ones in Catalan. In referring to the flattering words of Don Juan, the "drapaire" has this to say:

Si me'ls dius m'acostaré més.

To which the protagonist answers on his knees:

Doncs acosta't i posa tota l'atenció:  
 "¿No es verdad ángel de amor  
 que en esta apartada orilla  
 más pura la luna brilla  
 y se respira mejor?"

<sup>3</sup> We have partially updated the spelling of the original, although we have aimed also at maintaining a certain archaic character.

The "drapaire" replies:

Si, si, se respira mejor, però espera't que vaig a obrir les finestres  
perque tinc calor.

He goes on somewhat annoyed:

¡Malo!

The "drapaire", sitting down, continues:

Ja estan. Apa, tornem-hi; aixis, que corri l'aire...

Barrila again, this time doubting a little:

"¡Oh bellísima...!"  
¿Com te dius d'apellido?

And she answers:

Pantoja.

He continues:

"¡Oh bellísima Pantoja!  
¡Espejo y luz de mis ojos!  
Escucharme sin enojos,  
como lo haces, amor es.  
Mira aquí, a tus plantas, pues,  
todo el altivo rigor  
de este corazón traidor  
que, rendirse no creía,  
adorando, vida mía,  
la esclavitud de mi amor."

The “drapaire” replies:

¡Oh! ¡Qué m'has dit, Don Joan!  
 Vaig a tirar-me als teus brassos  
 i el corasson a pedassos  
 petitets, iay! me treuran.  
 Jo no sé ja el qué fer  
 puig la vista se'm nuvola  
 i a n'el coll hi tinc la gola,  
 i assentada estic molt bé.  
 ¡Oh mon Joanet, Joanet!  
 Te demano relacions.  
 Res de versos ni cançons.  
 [Va per abraçar-la; ella s'aparta i cau en terra]

All of these parodic imitations must have achieved some success, but their literary intentions were minimal. The same can not be said about the more recent plays by poet and essayist, Josep Palau i Fabre.<sup>4</sup>

The Don Juan production of Palau i Fabre comprises five short plays written and performed in Catalan and translated by the author into French. The five, completed between 1951 and 1959, do not make up a cycle per se, although perhaps in resonance to Baudelaire, they insist on the subjects of death and the beyond. The predominant topic is Don Juan's eye-opening experience. He's a man incapable of loving and, consequently, unable to be really loved; in other words, incapable of being fulfilled.

The first of these plays was written in Paris in 1951. It is entitled *Tragèdia de Don Joan*. Don Juan weeps alone amid his feats, from which he cannot escape. He grieves his inability to be fulfilled as a man and as a father. At the moment of his death, he is saved by his sister Elvira who brings him back to childhood.

<sup>4</sup> Josep Palau i Fabre, *Teatre*, Barcelona, 1977.

The second play, also written in Paris, was completed in 1952. The title is very revealing: *Don Joan als inferns*; and its primary aim is to contrast the great lovers of the history (i.e. Anthony and Cleopatra, Tristan and Isolda, Romeo and Juliet) with Don Juan's attitude toward love. Even in hell he is so isolated that at a party in his honor, no one bothers to greet him.

The third play, completed in 1954 and entitled *Esquelet de Don Joan*, presents Don Juan (here: "Joan Gloriós i de Castellar-nau", most probably due to the influence of Maragall's "Comte Arnau") about to find true love by marrying Rosemunda. Don Juan's involuntary involvement in the death of Elvira's father puts him in jail, where he receives the visit of his mother, who harshly reprimands him. By the time he is freed, Don Juan is old and sickly and, still searching for the true love he has never known, he places an add in a newspaper, but he dies and a woman guides him into hell.

The fourth play, *Príncep de les tenebres*, was completed in Paris in 1955. As continuation in part of the previous play, a woman takes Don Juan into hell, where he is to be judged by a tribunal made up of the forces of evil. In hell, Faust sees in Don Juan a counterpart of his own exploration of the world of the senses. At the trial, Faust's defense of Don Juan is of no avail, Don Juan is found guilty and, as self imposed punishment, he decrees that he is to go into eternity married to Lady Evil. In justification he exclaims: "he escollit la perdició, la dona infern, per a poder salvarme".

The idea of Don Juan's alienation, present already in the previous play, is dwelled upon in the fifth and last play, *L'excés o Don Joan foll* ("Excess, or Don Juan the madman") completed in Paris in 1957. In this play, the surrealist influence is evident from the first scene, which takes place in a psychiatrist's office. There are a thousand windows which open and close and through which one can see faces of women with exaggerated make-up. The anguished



Don Juan has gone to the doctor's office but the doctor pays no attention to him, and, only because of the patient's insistence and desperation, gives him an appointment for a later date. In the next scene, Don Juan is already in a mental institution, repeating once and again, in the manner of rosary recitations, the names of all the women whom he has met but was unable to love. The play ends with the appearance on stage of a door through which Don Juan disappears, unmoved by Elvira's pleas as she confesses her love for him. Indeed, this end could not be further removed from the endings of the Don Juans of the Romantic period; it is closer to Tirso de Molina's *El burlador*, with the eternal damnation of the protagonist. We have here also Faust's theme without Margarite, in other words, without the possibility of redemption.

Palau i Fabre's work is original. It is also quite daring from the point of view of scenery and content. The prologue introducing the five plays is interesting and provocative. It is entitled "Idees per a un Don Joan". It was written in 1951, the year in which the first play was also written.

In this prologue, Palau i Fabre probes deeper into the Don Juan myth from a psychological angle, and, apparently without contradiction, he explores the possible ethnic origin of the character. According to the author, Don Juan's secret lies in the fact that he was able to comprehend the very essence of the woman, the secret of the eternal female, the woman characterized by a deep, well-rooted mimetism. Consequently, Don Juan would be the male who sought himself in women, becoming as mimetic as they. This inevitably brings him to dissatisfaction and eventually to a tragic end. His character is immature; he is the product of an adolescence prolonged beyond reason. This explains the very important role of Don Juan's mother in Palau i Fabre's plays.

It does not matter if we agree or not with this psychological interpretation (somewhat reminiscent of Lenormand's concept of

Don Juan).<sup>5</sup> We are dealing with a myth, and there is no doubt that myths are precisely such because of the variety of their possible explanations.

Personally we are more pleased with the second part of Palau i Fabre's prologue, particularly because, unaware of his opinion, we came to the same conclusions by other means. For him, as well as for us,<sup>6</sup> the birth of the myth of Don Juan in Seville, by the Guadalquivir river, is particularly relevant: Don Juan represents the man who is the product of the crossing of two civilizations: Islam and Christianity. He is not a "Spaniard" in the limited "Castilian" sense, which was the sin of the theoreticians of the "Generación del '98" and of Gregorio Marañón.<sup>7</sup> The ill-defined sense of "Celt" or "Galician" is not fitting for Don Juan either, even though it was suggested by Said Armesto,<sup>8</sup> and was accepted by M. de Unamuno in his "Sobre *Don Juan Tenorio*". Don Juan is rather a product of two conflicting cultures: the harem culture, and the culture of the cloisters. Palau i Fabre keenly points out that nothing is closer to the harems than the convents which formed an integral part of the Spanish *Tenorios*.

In other words, one culture is that of men who will be defined as "Don Juanes" by their sexual drive and behavior. The second culture is that of the spirit of conquest, in those who will become "conquistadores". These men are manifestations, or better yet, residues of two conflicting civilizations. In reality, we could even

<sup>5</sup> An acceptable synthesis of Don Juan's psychological interpretations in Jacinto Grau's *Don Juan en el tiempo y en el espacio: análisis histórico psicológico*, Buenos Aires, 1953.

<sup>6</sup> See "Dos notas sobre la génesis del tema de Don Juan", *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos* (April, 1968), 1-11.

<sup>7</sup> Gregorio Marañón, *Don Juan*, Buenos Aires, 1940.

<sup>8</sup> Victor Said Armesto, *La leyenda de Don Juan*, Buenos Aires, 1946 (First ed., 1908).

say that they are an expression of the avengers of a Spanish region forcibly conquered under the sign of the cross and the sword.

In 1976, after more than twenty years of so many interpretations, when Palau i Fabre published in Barcelona the complete edition of his plays, he considered that writings of Don Juan were no longer fashionable. Even further, he saw Don Juan as a discredited character: "Don Joan és, avui per avui, un personatge desacreditat". Moreover, all his plays on Don Juan have to be seen as a consequence and as a testimony of his youth in Barcelona of the 1940s: a time and place where the only character truly capable of rising some interest, was the man who tried to win the hearts of women. Finally, according to Palau i Fabre, his five plays were expressions of a past era, and, to use a word dear to the "snob" critics of the seventies, a clear manifestation of a "retro" theater.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> When this article was in print, we have known that a new Catalan Don Juan play is forthcoming: *El tango de Don Joan*, written by Quim Monzó and Jérôme Savary and directed by Jérôme Savary. This play is about to come out in Barcelona by November 1986.