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Potentiality in Lorenzo Da Ponte's Don Giovanni

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

The Department of English

by

James Ortego

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## Abstract

The thesis essay Potentiality in Lorenzo da Ponte's Don Giovanni explores the many facets of Don Giovanni's roles and functions in the opera by Mozart-da Ponte. The thesis states that Don Giovanni does not merely function as a libertine who is finally punished for his crimes; instead, Don Giovanni offers many various roles and functions to the other characters. The function of Don Giovanni at any given time in the opera depends upon the other character's psychological background and impression of Don Giovanni. For instance, the noble Donna Elvira looks to Don Giovanni for a lover; but the peasant Zerlina sees in Don Giovanni an opportunity for marriage, which would allow her to rise in social standing. Zerlina's betrothed, Masetto, sees Don Giovanni as a rival lover and threat, but the servant interprets Don Giovanni as an employer, who provides for him life's basic necessities, such as food, clothing, and shelter.

Don Giovanni's various roles are evident not only in da Ponte's libretto, but also in the Don Juan texts of Tirso de Molina, Molière, and George Bernard Shaw. Lorenzo da Ponte's text receives the primary focus, but the other texts are incorporated as well in order to show consistency in Don Juan's character; that is, he's always perceived in many different ways, whether the text is drawn from the Renaissance, Seventeenth Century, or Nineteenth Century. The thesis concludes on the note that Don Giovanni has no semantic in and of himself, but

rather it's the other characters who give him this value or role: which role depends upon the individual's psychological make-up and background.



Soren Kierkegaard argues in Either/Or that Mozart's Don Giovanni features a "characterless" protagonist. Since Don Giovanni easily evades the standard descriptive labels, types, and conventions, Kierkegaard's assessment seems at first glance plausible. However, upon closer examination and study, Mozart's "characterless" Don Giovanni emerges as an "Don Juan figure," molded and shaped after Tirso de Molina's primordial Don Juan, and so not really very "characterless" after all. Lorenzo Da Ponte's libretto reveals Don Giovanni to be a source of potential possibilities available to the other players, rather than a "characterless Don Juan figure," who either solicit or disregard his services. Don Giovanni presents a diverse array of abstract, concrete, physical, and emotional opportunities or potentials which serve to initially attract the other dramatic personae, often, but not always, into damaging relationships and circumstances. Depending upon the status, needs and desires, or psychological impressions of a character in question, Don Giovanni may represent a husband, father, threat, rival, employer, opportunity for social advancement, or simply a friend and companion. Thus, Don Giovanni's potential varies in relation to the other character's psychological impressions of Don Giovanni; in this sense, Don Giovanni resembles the verbal sign as defined by Ferdinand de Saussure: he has meaning not in himself, but only in relation to the other characters. For instance, Donna Anna, (a woman promised in marriage to Don Giovanni), sees him as a potential husband and father to her

children. But to Don Ottavio, Don Giovanni represents a rival lover and threat to securing Donna Anna's hand in marriage. Leporello depends upon Don Giovanni for food, clothing, and shelter, and as an employer, Don Giovanni provides Leporello with those things necessary to sustain life. Zerlina sees in Don Giovanni an opportunity to advance in social standing. If a peasant, such as Zerlina, marries a noble, such as Don Giovanni, then that peasant can rise in social standing, economic stability, and enjoy a life of ease and luxury. Quite often, marriage was the only way a woman could better her social position. Love has nothing to do with Zerlina's attraction to Don Giovanni; her pecuniary motivations spark her interest in Don Giovanni. Like Don Ottavio, Masetto feels threatened by Don Giovanni, his rival for Zerlina's hand. To Elvira, Don Giovanni represents pure sexual pleasure and the possibility to engage in an invigorating physical relationship. Don Giovanni complies with her wishes, but complications arise when Elvira falls in love with him; thus, emotions enter and spoil their physically-based relationship and Don Giovanni decides to leave rather than become emotionally involved with Elvira.

We err simply to label Don Giovanni as the dramatization of a libertine's exploits, an allegory depicting the noble class oppressing the peasant class, or the story of an unrepentant sinner punished by divine providence. An in-depth study of Lorenzo Da Ponte's libretto along with examples drawn from the Don Juan dramas of Tirso de Molina, Molière, and George Bernard

Shaw will reveal Don Giovanni to be a source of potentiality.

Since the libretto by Lorenzo Da Ponte will be the primary focus, the libretto's literary value will first be explored. While there exists some historical basis for studying the libretto apart from the opera, since many librettos were recycled and used again and again by numerous composers, some critics still have apprehensions concerning the separation of the libretto from the music, such as Julia Kristeva, who argues in "Don Juan, or loving to be able to" that,

The narrator's point of view is that of the moralist, that is, of the victim - in this instance, that of the woman seduced. This shines forth if one decides, through a wrong - headed choice, truly difficult to maintain rigorously, (because Don Juan is, for Twentieth-Century persons, so intrinsically constituted by Mozart's music) to read Da Ponte's libretto while ignoring the music. In that case, the seducer's smugness indisputably comes out; Don Giovanni is merely a feverish, pretentious lecher who takes advantage of the weakness of women and the common people, the more aroused as another man sidles close to his coveted mistress (Mazetto and 'Zerlina, or Leporello and Donna Elvira during the masked scene), anxious to conquer because incapable of keeping.

(192-193)

Kristeva's argument gives all the credit to Mozart for Don

Giovanni, and she does not feel Da Ponte's libretto commendable enough to consider on its own literary merit. However, numerous other critics have no qualms discussing the libretto apart from the music. In her book Opera, Or the Undoing of Women, Catherine Clément advocates the literary worth of Da Ponte's libretto, and she argues,

We should not, however, forget that Da Ponte was an inspired librettist. Yes, he wrote the text of Don Giovanni, attributed eternally and to the end of time to Mozart alone. And could Leporello's aria (the one called the catalogue because he counts the beautiful women his master Don Giovanni has already seduced) even exist without "the scrawny one" and "the pudgy one," "the young one, just a novice," and the number "a thousand and three" so perfectly punctuated by the music? Opera music makes its empire and steals the glory, dispossesses half the authors, permanently strips them of their work - without which opera's song would have no place. And the libretti are orphans. (18)

Clément re-affirms the literary value of Da Ponte's libretto and advocates the libretto's study apart from the music, and such a study may be done without any injustice to the music. The libretto's history of being re-cycled on various occasions, Clément's sound argument for Da Ponte's libretto, and the fact that the libretto remains the poetical part of an artistic whole

allows critiques which focus only on the opera's poetry.

There exists a wealth of criticism dealing with Don Giovanni, but limited amounts dealing with Don Giovanni's potential. In The Metamorphoses of Don Juan, Leo Weinstein paints Don Giovanni with a common brush when he argues that "The overall impression one gains of Da Ponte's Don Giovanni, however, is not that of a romantic hero; he is a cynical realist who searches for no ideal of any sort except his own pleasure." (62) Weinstein sides with popular opinion in that he believes Don Giovanni a mere hedonist and advocate of hedonist doctrine. While this viewpoint may correctly interpret the literal plot, it limits Don Giovanni's role, and offers only a narrow interpretation of Don Giovanni's character and the opera as a whole. Don Giovanni's richness and magnitude go unexplored, and the opera suffers from lack of critical insight. As a result, Weinstein's efforts to shed light onto Mozart-Da Ponte's opera limit the reader's understanding of Don Giovanni.

In James Mandrell's Don Juan and the Point of Honor, Seduction, Patriarchal Society, and Literary Tradition, he argues

The literary and social implications of seduction and Don Juan indicate that, as a character, Don Juan offers an opportunity for authorial rivalry - judgement by comparison and immortality. As a figure embodying specific social values, he serves as a domesticating force, as a principle of order in the social chaos that surrounds him. (227)

Don Juan offers many things to many characters (even opportunities for immortality, if Leporello records such incidents in his "book"), but for the most part, Don Juan's interplay with the other characters usually disrupts rather than restores the social order, by such means as mixed marriages between noble and peasant and threats of violence due to disagreements in amorous matters. Although each instance differs from the others, socially disruptive events usually occur when Don Juan interacts with the other characters.

In "The Don Juan Theme in Molière and Kierkegaard," Ronald Grimsley argues that,

Perhaps, in the strictest sense of the term, it is not correct to call the legendary and Mozartian Don Juan a "seducer", because he is not, properly speaking, an individual but a "power which nothing can withstand." To be a seducer demands reflection and cunning. This consciousness is lacking in Don Juan, therefore, he does not seduce. (319)

Grimsley's article raises more questions than it answers, such as exactly what or who is Don Giovanni? How does he function in Mozart-Da Ponte's Opera? And Is he a supernatural being, or just an ordinary man? Despite the questions Grimsley's article raises, he does allow that Don Giovanni is a complex individual whose function varies from character to character. More precisely, Don Giovanni offers numerous potentials to the other characters, depending upon their desires and motivations.

In The Last Troubadours--Poetic Drama in Italian Opera, Deirdre O'Grady argues that "Da Ponte has succeeded in drawing his characters on diverse scales. The Don towers over the other personae, who in truth are no more than symbolic abstractions, while the figure of the Commendatore is the dramatic externalization of the guilt which the liberal Don does not sense" (87). O'Grady correctly assesses the supporting characters as "symbolic abstractions," but does not consider Don Giovanni's role or interaction with these characters. Don Giovanni functions on various levels, offering various potentials to the other players; which potentials depend upon the character's psychological impression of Don Giovanni.

In The Mozart-Da Ponte Operas, Andrew Steptoe argues that "One of the most remarkable facets of Mozart and Da Ponte's presentation is the chameleon-like quality of the hero. He achieves each of his purposes by adopting an appropriate image; Ottavio in the Introduzione, the disguise as a servant when seducing a maid in Act II." (202) Steptoe's essay explores Don Giovanni's character and concludes that Don Giovanni assumes numerous images in order to achieve his ends. My argument differs a bit in that I propose the other characters observe various potentials of Don Giovanni which are based on the individual's psychological impressions of Don Giovanni. Steptoe makes Don Giovanni the active agent of seduction, whereas I conclude Don Giovanni simply acts much like a verbal sign, and his potential ever changes, depending upon the other character's

impression of Don Giovanni. A closer study of Da Ponte's libretto and the Don Juan texts of Tirso de Molina, Molière, and George Bernard Shaw will shed further light on Don Giovanni's potentiality and the dramatic player's differing reactions to such potentiality. We will see that while the Don Juan texts differ, the characters in all texts still interpret Don Juan according to their own impressions of him; that is, his potential is not limited to Da Ponte's libretto alone.

In Molière's Don Juan, or The Statue at the Feast, Dona Elvira winds up as an avenger of Heaven's fury directed at Don Juan. Molière's Dona Elvira is married to Don Juan, who abandons her for a life of lust. But she still sees Don Juan as a potential husband, and upon meeting him after he has left her, she optimistically and naively asks him,

Why don't you swear that your feelings for me are unchanged, that you still love me more than all the world, and that nothing but death can part us? Can you not say that business of the most pressing importance forced you to leave without an opportunity of informing me, that you are obliged to remain here for a while against your own wishes, and that if only I will return whence I came I may be assured that you will follow at the earliest possible moment? That you are only too eager to be with me again, and that while you are away from me you suffer the agonies of a body bereft of its soul? Is that not how you



should justify yourself instead of letting yourself  
be put out of countenance as you are? (I,i,207)

In this scene, Dona Elvira hopefully clings to the Don Juan she knows and loves as a husband, and she struggles in accepting any status changes in her marital life, even though Don Juan and Sganarelle both try to convince her otherwise. Dona Elvira's perception of Don Juan does change a bit later, and she, like Da Ponte's Donna Elvira, sees Don Juan as a "villain" who must be punished for his crimes. Heaven becomes involved, and we learn of Dona Elvira's role as avenger when she tells Don Juan "Be assured that your infidelity will not go unpunished and that the Heaven you mock at will find means to avenge your perfidy to me!" (I,i,208) Molière's Dona Elvira has now come full circle, and Don Juan's potential to her has involved his being a lover, husband, and finally, an adversary. Thus, we see Molière's Don Juan as an agent who possesses various potentials which the other characters, (depending on their status, social, and economic backgrounds) interpret according to their desires.

In Da Ponte's libretto to Don Giovanni, Act I, Scene V, we meet Donna Elvira for the first time, bemoaning her broken heart, compliments of Don Giovanni. In this scene, Donna Elvira's perceptions of Don Giovanni change three times, so that she sees in Don Giovanni his potential as a lover, a husband, and an enemy. When Donna Elvira is solitary, she thinks of Don Giovanni as a lover who greatly disappointed her, and

it is here, in solitude, that Donna Elvira reveals her passion for Don Giovanni as a lover. However, when Don Giovanni meets Donna Elvira and she's face to face with him, Donna Elvira views Don Giovanni as a lost husband - he now signifies to her a potential marriage partner, lost to her (Donna Elvira states) because she has loved him too well. Soon after Don Giovanni makes his timely exit, Donna Elvira swears vengeance upon him, and we observe Don Giovanni change yet again in Donna Elvira's eyes, in that he is now her enemy.

In the beginning of Act I, Scene V, Donna Elvira laments "Ah, shall I ever find him?/ Who broke my heart in play./ Nor faith nor love could bind him,/ he cast them both away." (I,v, 1-4) These lines characterize Donna Elvira as a jilted lover, and her speech desires the return of her beloved, Don Giovanni. In this instance Don Giovanni's potential manifests itself to Elvira as a lover, and he remains a lover foremost in her heart. However, Donna Elvira's perception changes a bit later, when Don Giovanni and Leporello accidentally stumble across her path. Upon meeting Don Giovanni, Donna Elvira claims "With solemn oaths and flattering words/ you succeeded in seducing my heart/ And in making me love you./ You promised me marriage, then in / defiance/ Of the most sacred rights of earth and/ Heaven,/ O despicable creature" (I,v, 29-34). Donna Elvira now perceives Don Giovanni as a lost husband, rather than a lost lover. His potential now shifts towards conjugal matters, rather than lustful ones, and in the presence of others, (Leporello and

Don Giovanni), Donna Elvira protests her loss of a husband, rather than a lover. Previously, we observed Donna Elvira interpret Don Giovanni as a possible lover; then later, under the scrutiny of the other characters, she changes her story a bit and equates the loss of Don Giovanni with the loss of a husband. By changing her perception of Don Giovanni, she saves face, avoids condemnation from her peers, and casts him in a more evil light. If the other characters knew Donna Elvira's loss was simply sexual pleasure, they would be less willing to condemn Don Giovanni, and more apt to condemn Donna Elvira. Later, in condemning him fully, Donna Elvira notes he broke the "most sacred rights of earth and Heaven" (I,v, 33), in her language we are thus able to trace Don Giovanni's potential and Donna Elvira's perceptions of his potential; first, as a lover; second, as a husband; third, as an enemy. Soon after Donna Elvira shifts her course for the third time, we see Don Giovanni as an enemy who soon will suffer vengeance at Donna Elvira's hands; as she has now become an active agent of vengeance, she tells him "But Heaven is/ just,/ and willed it that I should find you/ To wreak its vengeance and my own too" (I,v, 46-48). Donna Elvira now interprets Don Giovanni as an enemy, and sees herself as the agent of justice and revenge ordained by Heaven to actively wreak vengeance upon Don Giovanni for his crimes. Donna Elvira's new role and respect towards Don Giovanni is soon confirmed after the catalogue Aria, when Leporello describes in detail Don Giovanni's many conquests,

and Donna Elvira re-affirms her thoughts and perceptions concerning Don Giovanni as she concludes,

And so Don Giovanni/ Has deceived and betrayed me.  
Thus he/ rewards me/ For the loving affection that  
I gave him./ Ah, I will take my vengeance./ He's  
rejected my love. He shan't escape/ me./ I'll pursue  
him and find him. My heart is/ raging/ with a bitter  
despair, anger, and/ resentment. (I,vi, 1-7)

Donna Elvira here laments losing Don Giovanni as a lover and a possible husband, and her only recourse, (due to her noble pride), lies in becoming an avenger pitted against Don Giovanni. Thus, in the space of 50 or so lines, we see Donna Elvira interpret Don Giovanni in multiple ways - when alone, Donna Elvira thinks of him as a lover, but when confronted with Don Giovanni in person, he becomes to her a possible husband, then when this option dissolves, an enemy. Thus, we see Donna Elvira's perceptions of Don Giovanni change in order for her to remain "noble" in the public eye. When others are absent, Donna Elvira gives sway to fleshly pleasures, but when others are present, then she adopts moral virtues and suddenly becomes an advocate for justice. The role Don Giovanni assumes depends upon the character's perception of him; for the noble Donna Elvira, he emerges as a lover, then husband, and finally when neither of these two fit, an enemy.

In Tirso's Don Juan, the motives of Aminta for accepting Don Juan's marriage proposal parallel those of Zerlina in Da

Ponte's libretto; that is, Aminta longs for social status, and the potential rise in social standing prompts her to agree to become Don Juan's wife, even though she struggles a bit more than Zerlina. When Don Juan first appears to Aminta, she responds by saying "Woe to me! I have met my doom!/ You at this hour and in my room?" (III,i, 2023-2024). She firmly protests Don Juan's proposal, and a little later as well, when she tells him "Away from me!" (III,i, 2045). However, Don Juan quickly perceives the way to win Aminta to his bed lies in material matters and status, and so changes course a bit, and tells Aminta "I am a noble gentleman/ head of the whole Tenorio clan,/ That long ago conquered Seville./ After the king my father still/ enjoys great respect and esteem/ and at the court, as they all deem/ o'er life and death his lips hold sway" (III,i, 2051-2057). Don Juan here appeals to Aminta's ambitious side, hinting at the possibility of rising in social stature and power by becoming his wife. This works on Aminta, the peasant, and her strong resistance to Don Juan dissipates, and she relents fairly easily to him after his speech, saying, "With that oath your wife I shall be" (III,i, 2097). Aminta's ambition for a higher lifestyle has overcome her barriers of suspicion, and as a result, she becomes yet another conquest of Don Juan. Her perceptions of Don Juan change though, as does the potential he presents. At first, Don Juan was a threat to her happiness, but after it's revealed that he's a powerful nobleman, her view of Don Juan as a potential threat to her well being gives way

to her ambition when Aminta hears Don Juan say "I am a nobleman." The potential associated with marrying a nobleman gives way to her fears, and Aminta's defenses vanish. Thus, Don Juan's function and potential change according to the perceiver's (in this case, Aminta's) desire.

In Molière, the peasant woman Charlotte, engaged to Peter, submits to Don Juan a bit more easily than Zerlina and Aminta, (due to Peter's detailed description of Don Juan's physical appearance), but she succumbs to the same temptations and for the same reasons as Zerlina and Aminta; namely, Charlotte wants to become a "lady" and sees a marriage with Don Juan as an opportunity for her to achieve noble status. Charlotte gives away her feelings on hearing Peter describe Don Juan's near drowning. We learn her first interest in his physical appearance when she asks Peter, "Do'ee think 'e be still there all nakey body, Peter?" (II,i,210) Peter replies in the negative, and then gives Charlotte a very lengthy and detailed description of Don Juan's physical appearance, to which Charlotte replies, "Pon my word, Peter, I mun go have a look at that" (II,i,210). This early exchange between Charlotte and Peter illustrates Charlotte's initial attraction to Don Juan, which turns out to be physical. But upon meeting Don Juan, Charlotte's attraction to him becomes fueled by Don Juan's nobility, and what he can do for her. Her ambition takes over soon after Don Juan propositions her thus;

What! A girl like you marrying a mere peasant! Never!

It's a profanation of beauty--you were'nt born to live in a village. You are worth something far better. Heaven itself knows it and has sent me here for the very purpose of preventing the marriage and doing justice to your charms. In short, my beautiful Charlotte, I love you with all my heart. You only need say the word and I will take you away from this wretched place and give you the position in the world that you deserve. (II,i,214)

Upon hearing this speech, Charlotte becomes a bit flustered, not at Don Juan's declaration of love to her, but rather at the opportunity for her to achieve the status of a lady. A few lines later, she confirms her motivations for accepting Don Juan's offer when she tells Peter, who's angry at being thrown out in favor for Don Juan, "That don't make no matter, Peter. If 'ee do love me 'ee ouhgt to be main glad to see me a-goin' to be a lady" (II,i,216). Charlotte here reveals her ambitions to the audience by making us aware of her reasons for leaving Peter and agreeing to marry Don Juan, as well as illustrating the potential she sees for herself in Don Juan, which would allow her to rise in social status and obtain the title of "lady." Where Charlotte once thought of Don Juan in purely physical terms, wanting to see his "nakey body," she now perceives Don Juan as a means to achieve her ambitions in obtaining noble status. As for Don Juan, his potential has altered from physical appeal/lover to that of a husband. Thus,

Charlotte falls into the same category as Zerlina and Aminta, that of a peasant woman who interprets Don Juan as a potential husband, so that she may rise in social standing, and we once again observe Don Juan functioning much like de Saussure's verbal sign, in that his meaning emerges in relation to other signs.

In The Situational Drama of Tirso De Molina, Ion Agheana argues that,

Don Juan is the play's cleverest psychologist, precisely because he is ultra sensitive to other people's psychological makeup. He is dangerous because of his chameleon-like ability to adapt superbly to different people. He is a confidence trickster of genius, because somehow he ultimately inspires trust. Most importantly, he knows himself intimately as well, and he displays to his victims only that side of his character that he knows they wish to see. (23-24)

Agheana's argument refers to all the characters in Don Giovanni, but seems especially suited to the peasant women in Da Ponte, Tirso, and Molière. In Da Ponte's Don Giovanni, we first get a glimpse of Zerlina's motivations for going off with Don Giovanni so easily and leaving her husband-to-be Masetto behind from a few asides Masetto makes to Zerlina as Leporello leads him away. Masetto tells her, "Little Wanton, you degrade me, / For the last time you've betrayed me" (I,viii, 68-69). These two lines hint at previous trouble in Zerlina and Masetto's



relationship, and a few short lines later, Zerlina's motivations and intentions for going away with Don Giovanni are confirmed when Masetto says, "Since you long to be a lady,/ He will show you how to start" (I,viii, 73-74). Masetto here reveals for us Zerlina's heart's desire, and her perception of Don Giovanni's potential for her, which is marriage. If she, a peasant, were to marry a nobleman, her status would elevate to that of a "lady"; Zerlina would enjoy a rise in social standing, and a life of ease and luxury. Gone would be the struggles of the peasant class, and welcome would be wealth and pleasure.

Don Giovanni easily recognizes Zerlina's perception of him, and he plays upon this very early in Act I to fully win Zerlina to his bed. Don Giovanni dismisses Zerlina's promise to marry Masetto, and he plays upon her desires to achieve the status of "lady" when he tells her, "Such a promise/can have no meaning. You were not/ intended/ To live as a peasant: a different fate/ I can read in those eyes so revealing,/ In those lips so appealing,/ And in those little fingers soft and tender,/ whose fragrance delights me, whose touch/ delights me" (I,ix, 13-19). In this little exchange between Don Giovanni and Zerlina, we are able to see more clearly Zerlina interpreting Don Giovanni's offer based on her ambition; that is, she wants to become a lady. Zerlina realizes that her marriage to Don Giovanni would bring her the "lady" status she desires, and we see Zerlina's sensory perception of Don Giovanni offer hearken to her own desires. She views Don Giovanni as a means to achieve

wealth, status, and a life of ease and luxury as a noble's wife. If we keep in mind Masetto's remark to Zerlina about her always wanting to achieve "lady" status, and just how important such a change could be to any peasant, including Zerlina, we are able to clearly see Don Giovanni's potential as Zerlina sees it; namely, as a husband. Don Giovanni, however, has other things in mind, although his true intentions do not hinder Zerlina's perceptions, as they are unknown to her, and here we once again see Don Giovanni functioning as a verbal sign. He signifies Marriage, and a rise in social status to Zerlina, because her past experiences and desires lead her to interpret his offer in this way.

Zerlina's decision to leave Masetto for Don Giovanni comes rather easily for her, and judging from Masetto's comments, "For the last time you've betrayed me" (I,viii, 69), it can be safely assumed that trouble existed between Masetto and Zerlina before Don Giovanni came along, and since Zerlina desires to be a "lady," it stands to reason that this desire of hers probably caused the strife that existed between Masetto and Zerlina. Since Masetto is of the peasant class, he can do nothing to help Zerlina's social status, but Don Giovanni, of the noble class, can, by marriage, elevate Zerlina to the stature of "lady." Thus, we see Zerlina interpret Don Giovanni according to her desires and how she wants to see him, which is as a potential husband. As for Don Giovanni, husband is only one of the many potentials he possesses, but it is the one sought

after by the peasant women in Da Ponte, De Molina, and Molière.

Don Juan represents various forms of potential and functions in numerous ways to the play's other characters, including his father. In Tirso and in Molière's Don Juan, Don Juan's father perceives him to be a troubled soul, who also happens to be his son, and who has somehow been misguided, and lies in danger of eternal damnation unless he alters his lifestyle. Filial love motivates Don Juan's father to try and prevent his son from suffering damnation, but the father's perception of Don Juan Jr. remains one of pity and care for a sinner on the wrong track. In Tirso's Don Juan, Don Juan Sr. warns his son, "I warn you, though it seems to you/ that God's indulgent, patient too/ his punishment comes in the end,/ and punishment there'll be, my friend/ for all you who profane his name/ and God's a tough judge, just the same,/ when death comes" (II,ii,1447-1453). This exchange between father and son reveals Don Juan Sr.'s perception of his son; he sees his son as a sinner doomed for Hell, unless Don Juan Jr. repents his licentious ways. We do not get the common reproaches one might expect a father to give his son, such as "Didn't I teach you better than that?" or "You're breaking your poor old father's heart," or any such other clichés. Rather, Don Juan Sr. appears as a minister concerned about the spiritual well-being of one of his flock.

In Molière, Don Luis perceives his son as a curse from Heaven, given him because of his excessive petitions to Heaven for a son. He tells Don Juan in reprimanding him, "Nobody ever

wanted a son more than I did, no one ever prayed for one more ardently than I, and now the son for whom I wearied Heaven with my prayers and thought would be my joy and consolation, turns out to be the bane of my life" (IV,ii, 11-14). Don Luis feels he has been cursed with Don Juan, and instead of perceiving his son as a disobedient child, or lost soul (as does Tirso's Don Juan Sr.), he sees Don Juan as the "bane" of his existence. Although this is not a very positive image of Don Juan, it does, nevertheless, reveal Don Juan in yet another light--Don Luis' personal experience and background causes him to interpret his son as a "bane" rather than a son, and we as an audience see Don Juan illustrated in yet another manner. Thus, between father and son, in Molière's Don Juan, Don Juan functions as a curse.

Very early in Act I of Da Ponte's Don Giovanni, after Don Giovanni slays the Commendatore and then runs off, Donna Anna arrives with her lover, Don Ottavio, who, upon seeing Donna Anna's grief and despair over her father's death, immediately comforts her and swears to avenge her father's death. As this happens before Don Ottavio ever sees Don Giovanni, he has no notion of his character, but probably pictures some sort of villain in his mind, perhaps rough and abusive. However, after meeting Don Giovanni face to face for the first time later in Act I, he loses his confidence in Donna Anna's accusations. Don Ottavio muses, "Could a gentleman like him/ Be so base and so cruel?/ I scarcely can believe it,/ But I will spare no effort/ Till I find where the truth lies. My heart is/ torn/

Between the duty of love/ And the duty of friendship./ I must prove her mistaken, or else avenge/ her! (I,xiv, 1-8) Clearly, Don Giovanni's physical appearance has had an effect on Don Ottavio, so much so that Don Ottavio now doubts the tears and lamentations of his love, Donna Anna, and wants to be sure of Don Giovanni's guilt. Don Ottavio's perception of Don Giovanni has now been altered, for a number of possible reasons: 1) Don Ottavio hesitates to believe a nobleman could stoop to such cruel actions, 2) Don Ottavio sees similar qualities in Don Giovanni that he himself possesses, such as noble rank, and amorous intentions towards Donna Anna, and psychologically speaking, destroying Don Giovanni would be like destroying himself, and 3) Don Ottavio has cowardly blood much like Leporello. The second possibility seems most apt, but in any case, Don Ottavio does interpret Don Giovanni in a manner different from the other characters, and so exposes another potential of Don Giovanni's character; that is, as a threatening lover.

Masetto is also a lover threatened by Don Giovanni, and Da Ponte juxtaposes him with Don Ottavio so we may observe how the reactions of a peasant lover differ from those of a noble lover. Masetto takes action right away; he does not feel the need to hem and haw, but instead in Act II, scene IV, Masetto asks Don Giovanni (who is disguised as Leporello now), "And/ You'll be able/ To tell us where to find him;/ We're looking for him so that we can kill/ him" (II,iv, 25-27). The peasant

lover wronged by Don Giovanni takes much more drastic action than the noble lover. Even later when Don Ottavio becomes sure Don Giovanni is the enemy he seeks, he tells the posse hunting for Don Giovanni, "All wait here for a short while. I am going/ To summon the authorities. Very soon you/ shall have/ The revenge which is due to you" (II,x, 10-12). Don Ottavio's actions differ quite drastically from Masetto's; both are wronged lovers who have had their beloved violated by Don Giovanni, both men are sure of Don Giovanni's guilt, and both see Don Giovanni as a rival lover. Yet the peasant Masetto actively seeks satisfaction, while the noble Don Ottavio prefers to procrastinate awhile, then appeal to some other authority to reprimand Don Giovanni. By juxtaposing these two wronged lovers, Lorenzo Da Ponte succeeds in illustrating another facet of Don Giovanni's potential, (that is, as a rival lover), while contrasting the recourses taken by the peasant and noble classes in similar situations. While Masetto might behave more like a jealous lover, nevertheless, both he and Don Ottavio view Don Giovanni as a threat to their amorous well being, and we see Don Giovanni revealed in another form of potential to the drama's players.

In Da Ponte's Don Giovanni, Leporello serves Don Giovanni because he needs his protection and provisions, but in Tirso de Molina's Don Juan, the servant Catalinon serves Don Juan because the plight of the servant class obliges him to endure such a life. In Act II, soon after Catalinon tries to get Don

Juan to change his ways or dismiss him, Don Juan responds by saying, "Once you're a servant or a maid/ You've no will of your own in fact:/ the only thing you do is act/ and you've got nothing more to say./ To serve is to gamble and play,/ and if you want to win, just do,/ for in this game, I'm telling you,/ he who does more will win more, too" (II,ii, 1367-1374), to which Catalinon replies "And from now on, I promise you,/ What you command me I shall do/ and at your side vanquish and kill/ tigers and elephants I will" (II,ii, 1379-1382). In this exchange between the noble Don Juan and the peasant Catalinon, we observe Don Juan functioning as a tool of oppression, and while he may provide Catalinon with food and shelter, he does nothing to help Catalinon's plight. Catalinon gives in to Don Juan because Don Juan holds the power of life or death over Catalinon. In this instance, Don Juan's potential, his function as Catalinon views it, exists as an object of oppression.

In Molière's Don Juan, Sganarelle relies on Don Juan (just like Leporello and Catalinon) for his livelihood. Sganarelle sees in Don Juan an employer, a source of revenue, who provides for him a living. Perhaps the best illustration of Sganarelle's perception and interpretation of his relationship with Don Juan comes at the play's end. After Don Juan has vanished into Hell, Sganarelle laments,

Ah, my wages! My wages! Everybody gets satisfaction  
from his death: the Heaven he offended, the laws he

violated, the girls he seduced, the families he dishonoured, the parents he disgraced, the wives he led astray, the husbands he drove to despair. Everyone satisfied but me! I'm the only unlucky one! After all my years of service the only reward I get is to see my master punished for his impiety with my own eyes and in the most dreadful way possible. My wages, My wages-my wages! (V,i,247)

Sganarelle's last speech serves two purposes; 1) It reminds the audience of Don Juan's crimes, and why he was punished, and 2) It illuminates Sganarelle's perceptions of Don Juan, and what Don Juan's death means to him. Mainly, Sganarelle loses his employer, and has suffered loss of his wages due, which provides for him life's basic necessities. Sganarelle does not receive as rough a treatment as does Catalinon, but nevertheless, Leporello, Catalinon, and Sganarelle all view their master as a source of income and provider of their livelihood, and so Don Juan's functions and potentials range out further, and now include employer along with rival, lover, husband, lost soul, and misguided son.

Charles Ford argues in COSI? Sexual Politics in Mozart's Operas that, "Leporello, though disgusted by his master's behavior, needs his wage, and it is this, the fundamentally economic basis of their relationship, that thematises the incipient bourgeois moral dilemma concerning what one might or might not do for money" (118). Ford touches on an important



aspect of Leporello and Don Giovanni's relationship, which is that Leporello sees Don Giovanni primarily as an employer, someone who provides him with food, clothing, and shelter. At times, Don Giovanni also befriends Leporello, providing a necessary social setting in which Leporello profits by engaging in human contact. Early in Act II, we get an understanding of Leporello's financial obligations which compel him to remain Don Giovanni's servant, rather than running off and leaving his service. Leporello has just announced his intentions to leave Don Giovanni, and when words fail to persuade Leporello to stay, Don Giovanni appeals to his necessity, giving him "four gold pieces," to which Leporello promptly declares "Oh...In that case,/ Just for this once/ I'll agree to an arrangement,/ But this is an exception. I am not/ the sort of man to be seduced/ with offers of money, as if I were a woman" (II,i, 14-19). Leporello claims he cannot be bribed, then accepts Don Giovanni's money and returns to his service. And this just after Leporello is roughly handled and nearly killed for being mistakenly identified by his master as Don Giovanni himself. Only someone in financial need would be so easily persuaded by money, and being of the servant class, Leporello does not have too many options available.

At the drama's end, after Don Giovanni has been hauled off to hell, Leporello states his future plans: "I must find a better master/ serving is my only skill" (II,xviii, 46-47). Serving is the only means which will provide Leporello a

livelihood, and his interpretation of Don Giovanni is as a master, an employer. Don Giovanni's relationship to Leporello remains a business one, and another potential of Don Giovanni comes to light; that is, as an employer and provider of life's necessities to Leporello.

In Tirso de Molina's Don Juan, however, the statue functions as an agent of God, and the statue sees Don Juan as the enemy, whom Heaven has ordained for death. Towards the end of Tirso's Don Juan, after the meal is finished and the statue of Don Gonzalo clasps Don Juan's hand, the statue remarks, "The miracles of God, Don Juan,/ are e'er inscrutable to man,/ for your sins he now makes you pay,/ pay at the hands of a dead man,/ And if you pay that very way/ it is God's justice and God's plan:/ Remember the proverbial rhyme:/ Let the punishment fit the crime!" (III, vii, 2766-2773) This ending to Don Juan illustrates the statue as an avenger, sponsored by God, who finally takes his revenge on Don Juan. Death does not change the statue's motivations or perceptions of Don Juan, as it does in Man and Superman, and we see the statue behold Don Juan as an adversary whom he's bent on destroying. The statue mentions "God's justice" in his speech to Don Juan, which helps the audience easily see the moral to the tale, but we also see Don Juan functioning in a different manner than libertine. Don Juan serves the statue as an enemy, because the statue's past experiences with Don Juan, combined with his psychological makeup causes him to react spitefully towards Don Juan and treat him

as an adversary.

In Molière's Don Juan, the closing scene between the statue and Don Juan runs much shorter than Tirso's or Da Ponte's due to Molière's comical twist on the Don Juan story. The statue as an avenging agent of heaven remains intact, as does Don Juan as enemy to the statue. The statue tells him "Don Juan, those who persist in their wickedness come to dreadful ends; those who reject Heaven's mercy bring down its wrath" (V,i,247). With these few lines, Don Juan's fate becomes sealed, and the statue as an avenging agent culminates in this scene. Once again, we see Don Juan in a manner other than libertine; namely, an advisory who loses his life to the avenging statue. Moliere keeps the death of Don Juan to a minimum, because death tends to darken comedies. Nevertheless, Don Juan assumes another function based on another character's individual interpretation of Don Juan, and here we see the statue finally extracting revenge against his enemy.

In Da Ponte's Don Giovanni, the statue's meeting with Don Giovanni remains inspired by Heaven, but gone are the threats Tirso de Molina makes use of in his Don Juan. Instead, the statue views Don Giovanni as a poor, foolish sinner, whom he is unable to help, despite his best efforts. The Commendatore offers Don Giovanni one last chance at repentance, saying, "Penitence still can save you/ Or face the final sentence" (II,xvii, 37-38). Don Giovanni replies, "No, I despise repentance, off with you! Leave my sight!" (II,xvii, 39-40)

The Commendatore no longer recalls wrongs suffered at the hands of Don Giovanni, but instead, we now see the Commendatore offering Don Giovanni one last chance to repent and save himself. In this treatment of Don Giovanni by the Commendatore, Don Giovanni now functions as a foolish sinner in the eyes of the Commendatore. Because of the Commendatore's perceptions of Don Giovanni, we now see Don Giovanni's potential to be interpreted as a foolish and unrepentant sinner who suffers because of his own folly.

In Robert Brustein's "Bernard Shaw: The Face Behind the Mask," he argues, "From the Tirso de Molina Burlador de Sevilla to the Mozart-Da Ponte Don Giovanni, Don Juan has always been represented as a libertine and seducer who is finally punished by supernatural powers for his various sexual crimes. Shaw, on the other hand, is more attracted to the philosophical implications of the Don Juan story" (108). Brustein's argument applies, in particular, to the third act of Shaw's Man and Superman, in which we see the commander and Don Juan laughing over old times, like two re-united army buddies. On the subject of the commander's death at Don Juan's hands, the commander tells Don Juan "You would have slain yourself in the blind efforts to fence but for my foot slipping, my friend" (III,348), to which Don Juan replies "Audacious ribald: your laughter will finish in hideous boredom before morning" (III,348). The commander laughs at this retort, and continues, "Ha Ha! Do you remember how I frightened you when I said

something like that to you from my pedestal in Seville? It sounds rather flat without my trombones" (III,348), to which Don Juan remarks, "They tell me it generally sounds flat with them, Commander" (III,348). This exchange portrays Don Juan and the slain Commander in the after-life as two old friends talking over old times, and we see Don Juan adopt another potential and function as the Commander in Shaw's Man and Superman interprets Don Juan as an old friend, rather than an enemy.

Shaw does explore the philosophical implications of the Don Juan story, as Brustein suggests, in particular, the question of What happens after time passes, and all the drama's players meet somewhere in the after-life? Even in the after-life, Don Juan continues to represent a versatile character, and he still continues to function in different ways to different people. The individual character's psychological background will determine just how Don Juan functions to them. The Commander, a military leader and soldier, interprets Don Juan as a warrior who once bested him, (although by accident, he claims), and so chooses to re-hash old battle stories with Don Juan. Thus, In Man and Superman, we see the Commander address Don Juan's warrior potential, and so Don Juan emerges in yet another light.

Finally, we as audience members, when we view Don Giovanni, come away with various interpretations and reactions to the drama, which depend upon the individual audience member's background and psychological composition. For instance, the drama's

very beginning portrays Leporello bemoaning his working conditions as employee of Don Giovanni, and we hear him say, "Hot and dry, or cold and wet,/ Waiting, working, night and day,/ Not a word of thanks I get,/ Little sleep and wretched pay./ I was made for wealth and leisure,/ Born to order, not obey!" (I,i, 1-6) No doubt there are many audience members who feel as Leporello does. The person watching and listening to Leporello, who suffers the same job dissatisfactions as Leporello does, will identify with his complaints, and perhaps think to their own employment situation, or some cruel supervisor whom they worked for once upon a time. As a result, the potential of Don Giovanni reaches not only the drama's players, but the audience as well.

Another example of how the audience may react differently to Don Giovanni's actions occurs in the first scene when Don Giovanni slays the Commendatore, and Donna Anna soon after discovers her dead father. Upon seeing her dead father, Donna Anna wails, "But what terrible sight...Oh, God,/ What scene of horror lies here before/ me?/ O father...my father...my dearest/ father" (I,iii, 7-10). This scene may work a number of ways, depending upon the audience member in question. For those who have lost a father to death, pity may be aroused for Donna Anna, and contempt for Don Giovanni. For those whose fathers have died violent, unnecessary deaths, sheer hatred might be felt towards Don Giovanni, and they watch the rest of the drama, eagerly anticipating Don Giovanni's death in

retaliation for his crimes. Still others may have wronged females in a manner similar to which Don Giovanni has done to Donna Anna, and they might slump sheepishly and guiltily in their seats. And there might be others, still, who are wicked persons themselves, and who see nothing wrong with Don Giovanni's actions, and may even actually cheer for Don Giovanni to escape all forms of justice.

Another example which illustrates how the audience members may realize other facets of Don Giovanni occurs when Masetto and Zerlina argue, upon meeting again after she had gone off with Don Giovanni. Masetto, in response to her pleas, tells the audience in an "aside", "Look at that, the little witch! She knows how to get round me. It just/ shows/ That we men are weak and stupid" (I,xvi, 35-37). To be sure, more than one man has been "wrapped around the little finger" of a woman, and scenes such as this will cause the audience to reflect on their own personal experiences, thus broadening the range and scope of the drama as a whole.

Depending upon the individual person or character's past experiences and psychological profile, Don Giovanni may signal a wide range of reactions and interpretations. When Donna Elvira's alone, she interprets Don Giovanni as a lover, but when Donna Elvira's in the company of other characters, she sees him as a potential husband. Leporello's social status determines his perception of Don Giovanni as an employer, and Don Ottavio and Masetto interpret Don Giovanni as a rival and

threat. Aminta, Zerlina, and Charlotte are all peasant women who aspire to rise above their present social status. As a result, they interpret Don Giovanni as a potential husband, because marriage to a nobleman would easily allow them the status they could not otherwise achieve. In this sense, we see that Don Giovanni's various potentials are determined by his relationships with the other players. He functions on many levels to the drama's cast of characters, including the audience.

Throughout Da Ponte's Don Giovanni, we have seen Don Giovanni interpreted as a lover, rival, threat, enemy, lost soul in need of repentance, employer, potential husband, and misguided sibling. The nature of Don Giovanni's potential, that is, the manner in which the other characters view Don Giovanni, depends upon each individual character's psychological background, past experiences, and future desires. Hence, Donna Elvira sees Don Giovanni as a lover, whereas Charlotte, Zerlina, and Aminta mark Don Giovanni as a husband, in which marrying the noble Don Giovanni would enable them to rise in social standing and become a "lady." Leporello, Catalinon, and Sganarelle see Don Giovanni as an employer, but Masetto and Don Ottavio see him as a rival and threat to their love interests. The various character's interpretations of Don Giovanni allow us to see that Don Giovanni functions much like the verbal sign proposed by Ferdinand de Saussure. Don Giovanni, by having such broad potentials, enlarges the drama's appeal, and we as an audience are not confined to an interpretation of Don Giovanni as the simple



story of a libertine punished for his sexual crimes.

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## EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT

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Title of Thesis: Potentiality in Lorenzo de Ponte's  
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Date of Examination:

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