

The Theme of Human Communion and Torrente Ballester's *Don Juan*

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As part of a general trend toward a more subjective point of view which has appeared in all art forms during the past few centuries,¹ considerable attention has been given to the inner awareness of the individual in the novel of the twentieth century. In the realm of novelistic techniques, this has produced radical changes in the narrative structure. It has also brought forth a number of new thematic concerns, one of the most important of which is the problem of solitude, or its opposite: communion.² As the Argentinian writer Ernesto Sábato has observed: "Al prescindir de un punto de vista suprahumano, al reducir la novela (como es la vida) a un conjunto de seres que viven la realidad desde su propia alma, el novelista tenía que enfrentarse con uno de los más profundos y angustiosos problemas del hombre: el de su soledad y su comunicación." As a result of this new preoccupation with the problem of human communion, both love and sex have taken on increasing importance for the modern novelist. As Sábato puts it, "el sexo, por primera vez en la historia de las letras, adquiere una dimensión metafísica.... El amor, supremo y desgarrado intento de comunión, se lleva a cabo mediante la carne; y así, a diferencia de lo que ocurría en la vieja novela, en que el amor era sentimental, mundano o pornográfico, ahora asume un carácter sagrado."³

A notable example of the theme of communion and its relation to love and sex in the modern novel is found in *Don Juan*, by the Spanish novelist Gonzalo Torrente Ballester. This remarkable novel, published in 1963, combines realism and fantasy, with tragedy and humor, as it examines the theme of communion in a philosophical context, as well as from a religious and psychological point of view. This broad view of the problem is related, moreover, to the basic question of whether man is free to exercise his own will, or whether his actions are predetermined by factors beyond his control.

I.

Before beginning the study of *Don Juan*, I will make a brief survey of the problem of human communion in twentieth century thought. I will examine the ideas of five representative thinkers who have expressed varying opinions regarding the problem of communion. They are French philosopher and novelist, Jean Paul Sartre; Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset; the aforementioned Argentinian novelist and essayist, Ernesto Sábato; American psychologist Erich Fromm; and the French Jesuit philosopher and paleontologist, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

¹ See José Ortega y Gasset, "Sobre el punto de vista en las artes," *La deshumanización del arte* (Madrid, 1962).

² When I use the term "communion," I am referring to a state of complete union between two different human beings. This is what Erich Fromm refers to when he describes the result of mature love: "In love the paradox occurs that *two beings become one and yet remain two*"; *The Art of Loving* (New York, Harper & Row, 1962), p 21. The emphasis is mine.

³ Ernesto Sábato, *El escritor y sus fantasmas* (Buenos Aires, 1963), p. 88.

The purpose of this survey, together with the study of *Don Juan* which follows, will be to try to find an answer to the fundamental question: is man truly free to achieve a state of communion with another human being, or is he condemned by his very nature to live a life of perpetual solitude.

1) **Jean Paul Sartre.** Of all those I have chosen to consider, Jean Paul Sartre is by far the most difficult to discuss in an abbreviated fashion, since his ideas about human relations depend so much on the rest of his philosophy. To begin with, Sartre believes that pure being—what he calls “being-in-itself”—is a form of human awareness which is incapable of reflective consciousness and is therefore never able to comprehend its own identity or existence. The very instant it begins to reflect upon the nature of its existence, it ceases to *be*. Thus, being-in-itself searches continually for another consciousness which can comprehend it in an attempt to assimilate this consciousness and capture the meaning of its own being. This attempt is always doomed to failure, however, since when the Other becomes aware of my existence, something fundamental occurs: although I am responsible for my being, it is founded and therefore controlled by the Other; I am no longer a *free subject*, but rather an *object* possessed by the Other.⁴

The attempt to communicate with languages brings the problem of interpersonal contact into even clearer focus. For Sartre, language symbolizes our entire relation with the Other: “Language is not a phenomenon added on to being-for-others. It *is* originally being-for-others; that is, it is the fact that a subjectivity experiences itself as an object for the Other” (p. 372). And not only does language permit the Other to control my being; it offers no hope of communion since I can never know exactly what response my language produces in the Other. It is the Other who gives meaning to my language and, therefore, “Each expression, each gesture, each word is on my side a concrete proof of the alienating reality of the Other” (p. 374).

The stage is set, then, for a perpetual struggle between myself and the Other. Because if his mere presence constitutes for me a threat of alienation, my existence is equally threatening to him: “While I attempt to free myself from the hold of the Other, the Other is trying to free himself from mine; while I seek to enslave the Other, the Other seeks to enslave me.... Conflict is the original meaning of being-for others” (p. 364). Sartre’s concept of relationship is that of an alternating struggle of subject-to-object and object-to-subject, with no possibility of meeting on an equal footing. Regardless of whether we approach the Other with Love or Desire, with Hate or Indifference, the result is always the same: we are caught in what Sartre calls “the circle of relations with the other,” a closed circle from which there is no escape. As Sartre expresses it:

We pursue the impossible ideal of the simultaneous apprehension of his freedom and his objectivity.... But... we shall never place ourselves concretely on a plane of equality; that is, on the plane where the recognition of the Other’s freedom would involve the Other’s recognition of our freedom. The Other is on principle inapprehensible; he flees me when I seek him and possesses me when I flee him (p. 408)

⁴ Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York, Philosophical Library, 1965), translated by Hazel E. Barnes, p. 364.

It is easy to see, then, why for Sartre there can be no communion. In order for two people to become one, it must be as equals, as free subjects, and as Sartre has demonstrated in a logical fashion, it is inconceivable that two free subjects should come into direct contact and both remain free. In the final analysis, Sartre sees only two possible relationships with the Other: either I control and Other, or he controls me. Subject or object, master or slave—there is no possible escape from Sartre’s closed “circle of relations” with the Other.

2) **José Ortega y Gasset.** Like Sartre, Ortega believes that man is essentially free, and it is on this premise that he bases his belief that there can never be communion between individuals. For if man is free, he has complete responsibility for his actions, and even more important, he is absolutely alone when he performs them. As Ortega explains: “Nuestro ser... tiene que estar siempre haciendo algo, pero eso que ha de hacer no le es impuesto ni prefijado, sino que ha de elegirlo y decidirlo él, intransferiblemente, por sí y ante sí, bajo su exclusiva responsabilidad. Nadie puede sustituirle en este decidir lo que va a hacer, pues incluso el entregarse a la voluntad de otro tiene que decidirlo él.”⁵ Others may wish to share our life, but it is we alone who must experience our grief, our pain, our joy, our pleasure. And, if this is indeed the case, that life in its most radical reality is intransferable, then at the center of man’s basic nature is the characteristic of complete separation from other men: “La vida humana *sensu stricto* por ser intransferible... es esencialmente *soledad, radical soledad*” (p. 105).

Ortega admits that the urge for union is powerful and basic. All our attempts will be in vain, however, since even love is not enough to penetrate the wall of solitude which separates us: “El auténtico amor no es sino el intento de canjear dos soledades” (p. 108).⁶ For Ortega, moreover, there is still another factor which has a profound effect on interpersonal relations: the human body. Our body has the function of constituting us as creatures of space. It fixes us *here*, at a point in space which is separated inexorably from all other points in space. Thus, we have still another proof of the solitude which separates us from others.

Finally, although Ortega feels that a certain amount of partial communication between individuals is possible, true communion, the union of two souls is impossible:

⁵ José Ortega y Gasset, *El hombre y la gente*, in *Obras completas* vol. VII (Madrid, 1961), p. 104.

⁶ Ortega wrote *El hombre y la gente* during the years 1949-50, but it is interesting to note that in an earlier study, “Facciones del amor,” written in 1926, he seemed to take more or less for granted the opposite point of view, that individuals were indeed capable of uniting themselves through love: see *Estudios sobre el amor* (Madrid, 1966), p. 72. In a similar study written in 1927, “La elección en amor,” Ortega also denies that man is completely free, saying that there are certain predetermined factors which control our existence: see *Estudios sobre el amor*, pp. 127-163. This is not the place to attempt to discover the complete explanation for such a radical change of opinion, but perhaps, in the intervening years, Ortega read Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*. Although he never mentions Sartre or his work by name, and although many of the ideas are undoubtedly his own, the number of similarities between Sartre’s philosophical masterpiece and *El hombre y la gente* is indeed remarkable.

La única clase de seres capaces de responderme—de corresponderme y con-vivir conmigo—de quienes podía esperar que me hiciesen posible salir de mi soledad y comunicar con ellos, los otros hombres, precisamente por serlo, por ser *otros* hombres y *otras* vidas como la mía, son en su radical realidad incomunicantes conmigo. Sólo cabe entre nosotros una relativa e indirecta y siempre problemática comunicación. Mas, por lo pronto y a la postre, es decir al comienzo y al fin de mi experiencia en torno al otro Hombre, éste me es fundamentalmente el Ser Extraño a mí, el esencial extranjero (p. 175).

Thus, for Ortega y Gasset, as for Sartre, man is condemned to be forever alone in life. It is difficult to deny the logic of their arguments, especially those relating to man's freedom: namely, that two free beings can never unite on a plane of equality, and that if man is free, life is, in the final analysis, intransferable. In spite of the logic behind these arguments, however, there are others who insist that this is not the case, that there are ways in which man *can* satisfy his fundamental need for togetherness.

3. Ernesto Sábato. As noted earlier, Ernesto Sábato feels that communion has become one of the most important themes in the modern novel and that love and, especially, sex have acquired new philosophical importance. Sábato regards sex, and its principal instrument, the body, quite differently from Ortega. He agrees that if love is only physical, there can never be communion; there can be no interpenetration of two bodies which are physical objects. Love, on the other hand is spiritual; it is an emotion which is based on compassion and understanding and, as such, can reach to the core of the other. Sábato offers us, moreover, a solution for the impeccable logic of Sartre and Ortega, when he observes that communion is not based on reason, but on emotion and intuition which transcend the limits of rational thought.⁸

This is not to say that Sábato believes that communion is easy to achieve. On the contrary, in a world which tends to think primarily in terms of rational concepts and to place the major emphasis on material objects, all activity based on spiritual values is bound to suffer. Furthermore, even when communion does occur, since it is a non-rational experience, it is always fragile and transitory. The important thing for Sábato, however, is that it does exist:

No estamos *completamente* aislados. Los fugaces instantes de comunidad ante la belleza que experimentamos alguna vez al lado de otros hombres, los momentos de solidaridad ante el dolor, son como frágiles y transitorios puentes que comunican a los hombres por sobre el abismo sin fondo de la soledad. Frágiles y transitorios, esos puentes sin embargo existen y aunque se pusiese en duda todo lo demás, eso debería bastarnos para saber que hay algo fuera de nuestra cárcel y que ese algo es valioso y da sentido a nuestra vida, y tal vez hasta un sentido absoluto.⁹

⁸ See Ernesto Sábato, *Heterodoxia* (Buenos Aires, 1970), pp. 55-56.

⁹ Ernesto Sábato, *Hombres y engranajes* (Buenos Aires, 1970), p. 119. For a thorough study of Sábato's approach to the problem of communion see my article: "Psychic Integration and the Search for Meaning in Sábato's *El túnel*," *Hispanic Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Spring 1984): 113-125.

4. Erich Fromm. In his book, *The Art of Loving*, Erich Fromm declares that the most basic need of man is not, as Freud maintained, to satisfy the demands of his libido, but rather to escape the prison of his aloneness and find union with other human beings.¹⁰ He then goes on to discuss three ways in which man has tried to achieve this goal: 1) the orgiastic state of fusion found in certain primitive rituals, 2) conformism, and 3) creative or productive activity. These three attempts to achieve communion, however, are much less satisfactory than that of love. As Fromm expresses it: “The unity achieved in productive work is not interpersonal; the unity achieved in orgiastic fusion is transitory; the unity achieved by conformity is only pseudo-unity. Hence they are only partial answers to the problem of existence. The full answer lies in the achievement of interpersonal union, of fusion with another person, in *love*.”¹¹

Fromm feels, however, that love has been widely misunderstood, and he therefore examines what he considers its true nature. Disagreeing with Sartre, he says that love is a state which permits both individuals to retain their freedom. He adds that love is primarily giving, rather than receiving. It is not the giving of material things, nor is it giving in the sense of sacrificing or of being deprived of something. It is, instead, an expression of power and life on the part of the giver. By giving of that which is alive in him—of his joy and his sorrow, of his interest and his understanding—he proves that *he is free to give*.

In addition to the characteristic of giving, love has four other basic elements: care, responsibility, respect and knowledge. In speaking of respect Fromm again conflicts with Sartre when he states that “Respect means the concern that the other person should grow and unfold as he is... If I love the other person, I feel one with him or her, but with him *as he is*, not as I need him to be, an object for my use” (p. 28). Knowledge, according to Fromm, is what most helps us to penetrate to the core of the beloved, but as in the case of Sábato, this is not necessarily rational knowledge:

Love is active penetration of the other person, in which my desire to know is stilled by union. In the fact of fusion I know you, I know myself, I know everybody—and I *know* nothing. I know in the only way knowledge of that which is alive is possible for man—by experience of union—not by any knowledge our thought can give... The only way of full knowledge lies in the *act* of love: this act transcends thought, it transcends words. It is the daring plunge into the experience of union (pp. 30-31).

According to Fromm, then, union is not something you *know*, but rather something which can only be *experienced* through the act of giving oneself in love.

After having examined the active element of love, Fromm observes that there are several different types of love, two of which—brotherly love and erotic love—are important for the present study.

Brotherly love is important, not only because of its relation to all other types of love, but because of its function in producing communion. According to Fromm:

¹⁰ *The Art of Loving*, Op. cit., p. 9.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 18.

The most fundamental kind of love, which underlies all types of love, is *brotherly love*.... Brotherly love is love for all human beings; it is characterized by its very lack of exclusiveness. If I have developed the capacity for love, then I cannot help loving my brothers. In brotherly love there is the experience of union with all men, of human solidarity, of human at-onement. Brotherly love is based on the knowledge that we all are one (p. 47).

In his discussion of erotic love, Fromm again expresses an opinion that is shared by Sábato. Sexual contact by itself, he feels, is not enough to produce union:

If the desire for physical union is not stimulated by love, if erotic love is not also brotherly love, it never leads to union in more than an orgiastic, transitory sense. Sexual attraction creates, for the moment, the illusion of union, yet without love this “union” leaves strangers as far apart as they were before—sometimes it makes them ashamed of each other, or it even makes them hate each other, because when the illusion has gone they feel their estrangement even more markedly than before (pp. 54-55).

If erotic love includes brotherly love, it may also be a means of achieving communion. According to Fromm: “Erotic love, if it is love, has one premise. That I love from the essence of my being—and experience the other person in the essence of my being. In essence all human beings are identical. We are all part of One; we are One” (p. 55).

In a later work, *The Revolution of Hope*, Fromm explains further his theory that we all are One. In a discussion of empathy and compassion he declares that those who feel these emotions can achieve union because, in their most basic nature, all men are identical:

The essence of compassion is that one “suffers with” or, in a broader sense, “feels with” another person. This means that one does not look at the other person from the outside—that person being the “object”... of my interest or concern—but that one puts himself into the other person.... Compassion or empathy implies that I experience in myself that which is experienced by the other person and hence that in this experience he and I are one.¹²

This idea of oneness which is shared by all human beings brings Fromm into direct conflict with Ortega y Gasset, who feels, as we have seen, that life is intransferable. Fromm counters with the Jungian concept that each man has within himself the basic characteristics of *all* other men, so that what one man experiences is essentially the same as that which is experienced by another.

5. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Finally, I would like to look briefly at the ideas which Teilhard de Chardin presents in his short work, *Mass on the Earth*. Many of the things said by the French Jesuit philosopher coincide with what has already been expressed by Fromm and Sábato, but there is also one fundamental difference. The communion which Fromm and Sábato have discussed is strictly interpersonal, that is, it takes place between human beings. Teilhard adds a new dimension, that of cosmic or divine union, which includes not only the concept of oneness between different human

beings, but also oneness with God and all His creatures. The Jesuit philosopher tells us that this state of union is made possible through the mystery of transubstantiation and is part of the miraculous sacrament through which God becomes present in all material things in the universe.

As the reader examines these ideas, it becomes evident once again that the union thus produced is based not on logic or reason, but on love and faith. The entire process begins with what Teilhard also feels is the fundamental desire of all creatures for union: “In the very depths of this formless mass you have implanted—and this I am sure of, for I sense it—a desire, irresistible, hallowing, which makes us cry out, believer and unbeliever alike: ‘Lord, make us *one*.’”¹³ It continues with the Offering of the self to God, followed by the resultant Presence of God in the world, which is described metaphorically as “Fire in the Earth.” The union with God demands, at least in the beginning, a denial of self, and a complete acceptance of the will of God: “The world can never be definitively united with you, Lord, save by a sort of reversal, a turning about, an *excentration*, which must involve the temporary collapse not merely of all individual achievements but even of everything that looks like an advancement for humanity... In other words I must first pass through an agonizing phase of diminution for which no tangible compensation will be given me” (p. 31).

This would seem to agree with Sartre’s contention that it is impossible to come in contact with another free being and not sacrifice one’s integrity as an individual. Logic tells us this is the only possible outcome, but for Teilhard, paradoxical as it may seem, the individual is not destroyed by union with God: “I plunge into the all-inclusive One; but the One is so perfect that, as it receives me and I lose myself in it, I can find in it the ultimate perfection of my own individuality” (p. 26).

Thus, the individuality of all things does not impede the union with God. As Teilhard affirms: “All things around me, while preserving their own individual contours, their own special savors, nevertheless appear to me as animated by a single secret spirit and therefore are diffused and intermingled within a single element, infinitely close, infinitely remote” (p. 35). Union with God is a synthesis of several modes of being: action and passivity, possessing and being possessed, growing and being lost in what is greater than oneself. Surrender to God’s will, then, does not mean paralysis or lack of freedom, as the following prayer makes clear: “fill my heart alternately with exaltation and with distaste; teach it the true meaning of purity: not a debilitating separation from all created reality but an impulse carrying one through all forms of created beauty; show it the true nature of charity: not a sterile fear of doing wrong but a vigorous determination that all of us together shall break open the doors of life; and give it finally—give it above all—through an ever-increasing awareness of your omnipresence, a blessed desire to go on advancing, discovering, fashioning and experiencing the world so as to penetrate ever further and further into yourself” (p. 36).

Finally, Teilhard concludes with an optimistic affirmation of faith and purpose: “For me, my God, all joy and achievement, the very purpose of my being and all my love

¹³ Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, “Mass on the World” in *Hymn of the Universe* (New York, 1965), translated by Simon Bartholomew, p. 20.

of life, all depend on this one basic vision of the union between yourself and the universe.... I have no desire, I have no ability, to proclaim anything except the innumerable prolongations of your incarnate Being in the world of matter” (pp. 36-37).

In conclusion, then, the principal cause for disagreement between the writers we have just examined seems to reside in the relative emphasis which they place on reason. Sartre and Ortega prove logically that communion cannot exist. Fromm and Sábato also employ reason and logic, but they are not afraid to go beyond the limits of rational thought and appeal to the evidence of feelings and intuitions, that is, to non-rational awareness. Then, Teilhard de Chardin, whose ideas are the farthest removed from rational concepts, expresses his faith in an even more all-encompassing state of union.¹⁴ And now that we have examined the problem of communion in a philosophical and a religious context, in the second part of this study we will see how the Spanish novelist, Gonzalo Torrente Ballester, deals with it in his novel, *Don Juan*.

II.

The cultural background from which Torrente Ballester has drawn in order to create what I consider to be his most important novel is enormous. In addition to his obvious familiarity with the literary tradition of Don Juan, his knowledge of theology and philosophy is also very profound.

In order to make full use of this varied background, Torrente has organized the narrative structure of the novel in three different time periods: 1) the twentieth century; 2) the seventeenth century when Don Juan was born; 3) the beginning of mankind which is based on the biblical story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. This structure has enabled him to take the customary figure of the tradition hero and place him in a contemporary setting where he can be examined in light modern philosophical and religious thought. Although he has all the physical attributes of the typical Don Juan, Torrente's hero is a sincere, intellectual Spanish youth who has seriously considered entering the priesthood. However, upon the death of his father, Don Pedro Tenorio, he leaves his theological studies and returns to Seville to claim his inheritance.

It is at this point of the novel that the crucial moment occurs with regard to the feeling of communion, when Don Juan bathes his arm in the Guadalquivir river and experiences the joy of a brief moment of union with nature: “Llegó un momento en que me sentí como continuación del río, como parte del aire, como metido en el aroma de las flores... Como si de mi ser saliesen raíces que buscaban fundirse a lo que estaba a mi alrededor y hacerme con todo una sola cosa inmensa. Entonces, mi felicidad llegó a su colmo, y me recorrió el cuerpo una extraña sacudida.”¹⁵ This sensation of oneness is only momentary, however, and when it disappears it is followed by a sensation of loss: “Me di

¹⁴ Another writer whose ideas with respect to the state of cosmic or divine communion are very similar to those of Teilhard de Chardin is the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber. See his book *I and Thou*, (New York, 1958), translated by Ronald Gregor Smith.

¹⁵ Gonzalo Torrente Ballester, *Don Juan* (Barcelona, Ediciones Destino, 1963), p. 157. All quotations from the novel will correspond to this edition.

cuenta de que yo no era el agua, ni el aire, ni el aroma. De que yo era solamente yo, Don Juan Tenorio. Entonces me sentí profundamente desdichado” (pp. 157-158). Later that night on the balcony of the inn, Don Juan has a continuation of this experience, but once again it is only temporary and is followed by a sensation of loss.

Moments later, Don Juan meets Mariana, a local prostitute, and for the first time in his life has sexual relations with a woman. Still remembering the earlier sensation of loss, he tries to recapture the feeling of oneness by fusing himself with Mariana and, through her, with God and the entire universe:

Era como un deseo vehemente de unirme a ella; más que unirme, de fundirme. Se repitió el anhelo de aquella tarde en el río, se repitió la sensación de poco antes cuando estaba en el balcón. Esperaba perderme en ella, y, a través de ella, en el mundo de las cosas, de todo lo que aquella tarde había estado presente e incitante, el aire, la luna, el perfume de las flores, las músicas, y la noche. Abrazándola, quería con mis brazos abarcarlo todo: eran como árboles cuyas ramas innumerables fuesen a hundirse en las entrañas de la vida. ¡Qué enorme júbilo sintió mi corazón ante aquel cuerpo desde! Como si en él la Creación entera se hubiese resumido, como si el cuerpo de Mariana fuese instrumento de Dios (p. 164).

At the very moment when he seems to be about to achieve the desired state of communion with all that exists, however, he discovers that their physical pleasure has locked each of them in the prison of their separate bodies, and once again his joy gives way to a feeling of profound disappointment:

No creo que haya en el mundo nada en que un hombre pueda poner más esperanza, ni que le cause decepción mayor. Porque nunca me he sentido más yo mismo, más encerrado en los límites de mi cuerpo, que en aquellos momentos culminantes. Tenía entre mis brazos a una mujer gimiendo de felicidad, pero de la suya, como yo de la mía. El latigazo del placer nos había encerrado en nosotros mismos. Sin aquella inmensa comunicación apetecida y no alcanzada, mis brazos terminaban en su cuerpo impenetrable. Estábamos cerrados y distantes. Afortunadamente, fue rápido. Me sentí engañado y triste, y me vinieron de repente ganas de arrojarla de la cama a puntapiés (p. 165).

They eventually make love again, but with the same disappointing results. Hence, the stage is set for the principal conflict of the novel: Don Juan has tried to achieve union, not only with Mariana but, through her, with the entire universe, and with God. Since he has failed, he feels that God has rejected him; so he, in turn, decides to reject God, to rebel against the Creator of a situation which he considers unjust. And since he has been unable to find in them the communion which he desired, Don Juan decides to make women the instrument of his revenge against God. He finds that by winning their love, he is able to take the place of God in their life, thereby committing an act of blasphemy which will serve to express his protest.

Now that we have looked at the problem from a religious point of view, we can examine some of the psychological aspects of Don Juan's conduct. At various points of the novel, Torrente has given the reader clues to the motives behind the hero's actions. One of the first of these occurs during a conversation with Charles Baudelaire. Don Juan

describes the former's intense love for his mistress as though it were a form of slavery which limits his freedom. Baudelaire seems to confirm this opinion when he remarks: "Sólo he sido capaz de una técnica en mi vida con una sola mujer: la total entrega"; Don Juan replies: "Es que usted ama, y yo, no" (p. 122). This leads us to understand that Don Juan does not believe in love, because he sees it as a threat to his freedom.

On another occasion Don Juan compares himself to Baudelaire and suggests that, in addition to the fear of not being free, the death of his mother has affected his attitude toward love. He says that since Baudelaire knew only the overwhelmingly possessive love of his mother, women were always the dominating force in his life. He, Don Juan, on the other hand, grew up under the harsh authority of his father and for this reason has never been emotionally tied to a woman: "jamás mujer alguna me ha retenido" (p. 148).

In *The Act of Loving*, Erich Fromm has commented on the relation between the child and his parents in a way that sheds some light on the attitude of our Spanish hero. Fromm states that while the mother represents the natural world—the house, the soil, the ocean—the father "represents the other pole of human existence; the world of thought, of man-made things, of law and order, of discipline, of travel and adventure."¹⁶ He points out, furthermore, that a mature person assimilates the characteristics of both the mother and the father into his own personality and in this way achieving a successful balance between the two different attitudes. However, if the father is weak or indifferent toward the child the latter, like Baudelaire, "may remain fixed at an early mother attachment, and develop into a person who is dependent on mother..." If on the other hand, the mother is indifferent or absent, as in the case of Don Juan, the child "will develop into a onesidedly father-oriented person, completely given to the principles of law, order and authority, and lacking in the ability to expect or to receive unconditional love."¹⁷

As we see, then, the two opposite cases described by Fromm correspond very well to what we have observed in the personality of both Baudelaire and Don Juan, although for the purpose of the present study is the latter who interests us most. Don Juan has grown up under the tutelage of a father who never pardoned him for the death of his mother and who was unable to give him the type of love which is necessary for mature development. Don Pedro has also taught his son the importance of discipline and authority, as well as the pride of being independent. As Don Juan himself observes: "era una ley de orgullo" (p. 151). Another characteristic which he inherits from his father is the typical masculine tendency to think and act rationally. Thus, the traits of reason, discipline, authority, and the necessity to be independent have been the guiding principles of Don Juan's youth and, by his own admission, have made it difficult, if not impossible, for him to give or to receive love.

As the novel develops, however, we see that it is not only the influence of his father that has shaped the character of our hero. As he discovers later, during a dream of his ancestors, his entire family shares the same exaggerated, masculine mentality that finds its greatest strength in a rejection of love and other so-called "feminine" characteristics: "Sentí, por un momento, desamparo. Los rostros más cercanos revelaban

¹⁶ *The Art of Loving*, p. 42.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

interés, pero ninguna simpatía, menos aun amor. Tuve en aquel momento la intuición de que los Tenorios no habían amado nunca, de que en la falta de amor se había cimentado su fortaleza. Ni siquiera mi padre me miraba con ternura” (p. 173).

And having recognized that the strength of his family was based on the lack of love, he makes what is to be a momentous decision for himself: “En aquel momento comprendí que el amor estaba de más, y que al amor se debían mis vacilaciones y flaquezas. Hice un esfuerzo para descartar de mi corazón todo sentimiento que no fuese el deber, por obrar ante ellos como si nunca los había amado. Al hacerlo, sentí un gran alivio. Las cosas, sin amor, eran más fáciles” (p. 173). Thus, with the ironic recognition that, indeed, things are much easier without it, we have the explanation for Don Juan’s attitude toward love. Because he has never really known it and because he fears that it will limit his freedom, he rejects love, and the need to become rational and independent becomes the guiding force of his existence.

This is what eventually what leads him to reject Elvira, when he feels that he is in danger of being controlled by the instincts that stimulate his desire for sexual satisfaction. And this is also what makes him finally reject the love of Mariana. As he declares to Leporello, to give himself in love to her would be to lose his identity as an individual: “¿Sabes lo que se exige de mí?... Me exigen renunciar a mí mismo... ¡Está escrito en alguna parte, pero hasta hoy no comprendí el sentido! ‘El que quiera perderse se salvará.’ ¿No recuerdas? Pero yo no quiero perderme después de haberme encontrado” (233-234).

At this point, it is very revealing to examine Don Juan’s conduct in light of what was said in the first part of this study. Thus far, Don Juan has expressed perfectly the attitude of Sartre and Ortega with respect to the problem of communion. He feels that to love would be to sacrifice his freedom, to become an object which is controlled by the Other, and he also feels that sex only serves to make lovers aware of the physical separation of their bodies. Although he believes that it is unjust, like Sartre and Ortega, he accepts the fact that man’s basic nature is to live in solitude.

From the point of view of those who believe in communion, however, Don Juan has committed a series of tragic mistakes. First of all, he does not realize, as Fromm has pointed out, that true love can *only* exist in a state of freedom, that when one gives oneself in love it is an act which is *enhances* one’s freedom to give. His second tragic mistake is the rejection of love, together with his attempt to achieve union solely through sexual relations. His failure with Mariana, as well as with Doña Sol and with other women later, corresponds exactly to what Fromm and Sábato declared would occur when relations are purely physical, and the unifying power of love is absent. Still another tragic error is Don Juan’s use of reason in his attempt to find communion. When he finds no logical proof of its existence, he denies that communion is a reality.

However, after another experience of sexual relations with Mariana, he admits to his servant, Leporello, that he is not entirely certain about what has happened and that his reason has not given him all the answers: “Estoy perplejo... Quizás también un poco ciego, quizás haya caminado esta noche por un mundo para el que no sirven mis ojos ni mi inteligencia. Por lo pronto he sido feliz” (p. 231). He even admits to Leporello that if one can accept the lack of concrete proof of union, it is possible to be quite happy in the company of a woman. But, as we see, this still does not satisfy him:

Si frenas el apetito, si renuncias a fundirte en ella y ser ontológicamente uno, si te contentas con ese poco de placer que da la carne, descubres entonces que la compañía es muy hermosa.

—Dos en una carne.

—¡Eso es lo que no es cierto! Son dos carnes, inexorablemente; lo serán para siempre, al menos en este mundo. Eso es, pues, lo que no hay que buscar ni desear (p. 232).

There is some ambiguity here, however, because immediately afterward Don Juan remarks: “Tienes en cambio la vida, que deja de ser tuya, para ser de dos” (p. 232). One has the feeling that in this “beautiful” relationship with a woman, as well as the one life which can belong to two people at the same time, there is something which his reason does not allow him to understand.

This ambiguity become even more pronounced, when he realizes that although he must leave Mariana, there is still something which unites them:

Seguía abrazada a mí, y sus labios me besaban. Me daba pena abandonarla. Sentía que la suya era mayor que la mía, y que el llanto, las caricias, las palabras, no bastaban a expererarla. Sin saber por qué, la llevé a la cama, y entonces descubrí que dos seres pueden unirse sin el menor apetito de placer, sólo porque están viviendo juntamente algo que no puede decirse en palabras (p. 238).

Ironically, this “something which cannot be put into words” that he and Mariana “live together” seems to be the very state of union for which he has been searching and is now too proud, or too stubbornly insistent on reason, to recognize.

In one sense, one could say that Don Juan is a victim of circumstances, of having had no mother and of having had a family that taught him to scorn love and tenderness. In another sense, however, if he is truly free, as he believes, he is capable of choosing which factors will determine his life and therefore bears complete responsibility for the decision to reject love. In fact, Don Juan himself seems to accept this fact when he admits, after declaring his rebellion against God: “Examinadas fríamente, despojadas de toda carga sentimental, mis razones contra Dios podrían ser discutibles, e incluso yo mismo podría discutir las y aniquilarlas” (p. 184). He implies the same thing once again, later in the novel, when he observes: “Si Dios hizo las cosas bien, los hombres las hemos estropeado” (p. 238).

If it is indeed true that Don Juan is responsible for the decision to reject love, who is to blame for the lack of communion which is the basis of his rebellion against God? Don Juan has said that the lack of union with God and the universe “no es justo,” but in reality, who has been unjust with whom? The answer to these questions can be found in the remarkable “Poema de Adán y Eva,” the poetic history of Adam and Eve written by Dom Pietro, the cheerful priest whom Don Juan encounters when he travels to Italy.

When the poem begins, Adam is alone with God, and although he is happy to be with Him, something seems to be lacking. He feels one with God, but not with the rest of the universe: “*Ni las cosas me entienden, ni las entiendo...; al hablarlas de amor, me miran sin comprender. Somos distintos, no hablamos la misma lengua. Siento como si un abismo nos separase*” (p. 283). Thus, in order to fulfill this need, God creates Eve, and

when she and Adam make love, the love they feel not only makes them feel one with each other, but also with God and the entire universe. Adam thanks God: "*Te estoy agradecido, Señor, por haber tendido sobre el abismo este puente..., y por habernos hecho de tal manera que sienta en mi pecho la corriente de su sangre, y ella la mía, y los dos la Creación entera. Como si fuéramos uno*" (p. 287). Thus, the love that flows between Adam and Eve becomes the basis for the harmony that unites the entire universe.

At this point, however, the Satan appears and, noting that God has given Adam and Eve the gift of free will, decides to tempt them. He tells Eve that when she and Adam make love, if they keep their pleasure for themselves, it will be as great as that which God Himself receives. Eve is willing, but Adam objects, reminding her that the harmony of the universe depends on their love: "*En el amor que te tengo se encierra todo el amor de la tierra y del cielo*" (p. 293).

Nevertheless, they finally do as Satan wishes, and the results are disastrous. Without the binding force of their love, the harmony which had united all things is destroyed, and Paradise is lost. For the first time Evil enters the world. Furthermore, by keeping their love for themselves, Adam and Eve have shut themselves off from each other, and well as from God and the universe: "*Adán, ¿qué te sucede, que no te siento? ¿Por qué mi goce no sale de mi cuerpo, Adán? ¿Por qué el tuyo no me llega?...*" Adam responds: "*Hemos pecado, Eva, contra el amor del Universo, que era el amor de Dios*" (p. 295). And by not loving the things which He has made, they have in effect, hidden themselves from God: "*Adán, Adán, ¿adónde te escondiste?*" (p. 295).

Thus, Dom Pietro has answered our previous question. As he tells Don Juan: "No es lícito, pues, echar la culpa a Dios de lo que ha hecho el hombre" (p. 296). In the poetic version of the story of Adam and Eve we have seen that it is the original sin of selfishness, the absence of love, which not only causes solitude, but is also the basic cause of evil. And this is the sin that Don Juan himself has unknowingly committed.

The relation of Don Juan's experiences to what was said earlier by Teilhard de Chardin is quite clear, and here we find evidence of another tragic error. Even more than his desire to achieve a state of communion with a woman, Don Juan wanted to be one with the entire universe, and with God. However, he has not been willing to accept the divine will, nor to offer his love to God. When Dom Pietro asks if he has ever loved God, he replies dismissively:

¡Mi querido Dom Pietro! Si hubiera amado a Dios, no habría tenido ocasión de escuchar su interesante poema. Tengo por El respeto, admiración. Pero amor, lo que se dice amor, no lo he experimentado nunca. Tendría que haberle visto y haberme deslumbrado. Quizás entonces, si es tan resplandeciente como dicen, si es tan fascinante, hubiera olvidado mis objeciones, esas que usted conoce u otras que pudiera inventar, y me habría engolfado en su amor (p. 296).

Don Juan continues to feel that love is a sign of weakness, and he is unwilling to sacrifice his individual freedom in order to become part of the infinite Self of God. Furthermore, by admitting his lack of love for God, he has also destroyed the basis for his claim that God has been unjust. Like Adam, Don Juan has hidden himself from God.

It is also significant that Don Juan feels he might have loved God, if he had experienced some visible evidence of His beauty. Like all strict rationalists, he must have concrete proof of something before he can believe in it. Still under the influence of his father-oriented childhood, he trusts only in rational concepts and is unwilling to admit the importance of feelings or intuitions. As one of his female ancestors remarked on the night of his fateful decision to reject love and rebel against God: “¡Cómo se nota que no tuvo madre” (p. 179).

When Elvira reappears to make a final attempt to capture his love, Don Juan rejects her once again because he fears that to love would be to sacrifice his freedom. Elvira correctly describes his rejection: “¡Cobarde! ¡Cobarde ahora, cobarde siempre!... El amor te empavorece y te arrebató la color como el miedo a la muerte” (p. 313).

Finally, Don Juan refers again to the moment when the entire chain of events was set in motion, and he admits once more to Leporello that he may have been mistaken: “Siento dudas de haberme equivocado” (p. 319). His doubt, however, is not the anxiety of a person who lives with feelings and emotions, but rather skepticism of the intellectual who regards his conflict with God as only a “juego académico,” and who views things strictly from the point of view of reason: “Las dudas son cosa intelectual: hay que contar con ellas por honradez dialéctica. Y, ya que dices haber sido testigo de mi vida, sabes que nunca descarté la posibilidad de haberme equivocado” (p. 320).

Until the end, then, Don Juan is free and responsible for his acts, and since he is never willing to love, he also remains alone. Thus it is that when he finally dies, he is trapped in the mold which his life has formed. As he tells his ancestors: “No necesito que me juzguen. He muerto como Don Juan, y lo seré eternamente. El lugar donde lo sea, ¿qué más da? El infierno soy yo mismo” (p. 350). A perfect illustration of the concept that “existence precedes essence,” Don Juan is free to change as long as he exists, but in the moment of his death, his “essence” is fixed forever.

A final moment of irony occurs when he is rejected by his own family. Don Juan has been so preoccupied with being a Tenorio, that is, with being free and independent like the other members of his family, that in the end not even they can accept him. And with one last burst of arrogance in which the entire tragic situation is reflected, he exclaims: “¿Y por respeto a estos imbéciles me he enemistado para siempre con Dios?... ¡Fuera! ¡Iros a vuestro infierno y dejarme con el mío, que me basta! ¡Reniego de vosotros! ¡No me llamo Tenorio, me llamo solamente Juan!” (p. 353). Having finally denied his own family, Don Juan remains in his own individual hell, condemned to remain eternally a man without love, a man without family, a man alone. The “essence” of Don Juan in which he is now trapped inexorably is to remain forever independent, forever alone, as he was in life. As he expresses it in his concluding remarks to Elvira’s father: “¡Y, ahora, Comendador, a ser yo mismo para siempre” (p. 353).

* * *

After all this, there is no doubt that, in spite of Don Juan’s tragic end, the author’s opinion with regard to the problem of communion is much more optimistic than that of Sartre and Ortega. Like Fromm, Sábato and Teilhard de Chardin, Torrente clearly shows

that, in spite of his hero's rejection, love does not destroy freedom and that to become one with another person, or with God, it is necessary to go beyond the limits of reason. He has affirmed, moreover, that if there is no communion, it is not because God has made it metaphysically impossible, but because man himself is too selfish, or too fearful, to give himself in love. In this, we have found a possible answer to the question that was the central theme of this study. Since like Don Juan, we are all free to choose our lives, we can choose to follow the course of reason and stay by ourselves. Or we can, if we have the courage to take the risk, choose love and escape our solitude.

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