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Study Guide
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Day of the Dead
Study Guide on the Don Juan Tenorio by José Zorrillo
by Lisa Coye

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Mexican History: Theatre and the Day of the Dead

The Day of the Dead celebration began centuries ago when the ruling Aztecs would honor their fallen by laying offerings at burial plots. The Spanish Catholics then combined this Aztec tradition with religious themes. The Day of the Dead celebration has been theatrical from its inception. Large processions have moved through rural towns and large cities to culminate the celebration of honoring their dead ancestors at the cemeteries. The celebrations continued in public but then moved to the more intimate theatrical settings. This changed the tone, which became more informal. In theaters throughout Mexico familiar stories have been performed for generations. Audiences are often invited to join in the revelry singing songs that the people recognize. In small towns on open stages as well as the large cities with elaborate theaters performances include song, dance, mime, puppet shows and *cuentos* (stories). Day of the Dead performances in Mexico can be found everywhere from college campus theaters to churches and even bookstores erect temporary stages for their theatrical performance.

The Historical Impact of the play Don Juan

Since its inception, the play Don Juan has entered into humanity's psyche and given us a character that has transformed over centuries from villain into sympathetic hero. Don Juan has inspired paintings, songs, music and poetry. It has been remade into plays and movies. Traveling Italian actors pantomimed the play in France. Moliere rewrote it to great acclaim. Mozart composed an opera that fueled a Don Juan resurgence and interest. Lord Byron wrote an epic poem of comedy in which Don Juan is a lovable and loving young man with little personality. In each of its incarnations the public was given a new way of enjoying the exploits of Don Juan.



This character has lasted and been relevant for so long because he creates lingering questions about good, evil, retribution and morality. The play has universal themes rich with emotions, danger, intrigue, excitement and religion. At the core of the play is love that is abused for Don Juan's pleasure and ego. We can all relate on some level to how this character causes emotional pain and in some instances physical pain to his victims. Otto Frank, a follower of Freud wrote a scientific study that psychoanalyzed Don Juan as a psychopath. He has been compared to other leading characters such as Hamlet, Don Quixote, and Faust.

In modern times Don Juan is quite often portrayed as an admirer of women who seeks only to love them. He is handsome, rich, debonair and the fulfillment of every woman's desires. These attributes serve him well in whatever century he appears. Men who exhibit machismo may very well liken themselves to Don Juan-the great lover of many women. There are subcultures that exalt the ideals of Don Juan, fearlessness, no conscience or morals. Terrorist groups and urban street gangs as well as politicians and CEO's have fallen under the Don Juan characterization. Whatever guise Don Juan has appeared in we as a society have recognized and accepted him. We may judge the character but he is firmly imbedded in our history and culture.

The History of José Zorrilla

- 1817 José Zorrilla y Moral was born on February 20, 1817 in Valladolid, Spain. He was educated by the Jesuits at the Real Seminario de Nobles in Madrid.
- 1829 Wrote verses at the age of twelve and took part in school performances of plays.
- 1833 Zorrilla went to study law at the University of Toledo. After years of idleness he fled the university and went to Madrid. He embarrassed his family by making violent speeches and founding a newspaper that was quickly suppressed by the government. He escaped transportation to the Philippines and spent the next few years in abject poverty.
- 1837 The death of satirist Mariano Jose` de Larra brought Zorrilla notice. He read a poem at Larra's funeral, which served as his introduction to the leading men of letters. He published a book of verses, which was favorably received even though it imitated Lamartine and Hugo. He printed six more volumes within three years.
- 1839 Zorrilla collaborated with Garcia Gutierrez on a piece entitled Juan Dndolo.
- 1840 He began his career as a dramatist with Cada cual con su razon. In the following five years Zorrilla wrote twenty-two plays many of which were extremely successful. National legends supplied the themes of his dramas.
- 1844 Zorrilla is a major figure of the Nationalist wing of the Spanish Romantic Movement. He writes his most successful and best remembered play Don Juan. In Don Juan he adapts from Tirso de Molina's Burlador de Sevilla and from Dumas's Don Juan de Marana.
- 1845 Zorrilla's last and he believed his best play Traidor, inconfeso y martir is written.
- 1847 His mother dies and he leaves Spain. He resided awhile in Bordeaux and settled in Paris where his incomplete poem about gorgeous local color is written and later published in 1852.
- 1850 In a fit of depression, the cause is unknown; Zorrilla immigrated to America hoping that yellow fever or smallpox would take his life. During his eleven years in Mexico he produced very little.
- 1866 He returned to Spain to find himself half forgotten. His style was passé and new standards for taste were in fashion. The republican minister abolished a small post obtained for him. He was always poor and for twelve years after 1871 he was in the direst of straits.
- 1885 The Spanish Academy presented him with a gold medal of honor.
- 1889 He was publicly crowned at Granada as the National Laureate.
- 1893 Zorrilla died in Madrid on January 23rd.

The Play: Don Juan Tenorio

Characters:

Don Juan: the protagonist

Don Luis Mejia: Don Juan's rival

Doña Ines de Ulloa: Don Juan's fiancée

Doña Ana de Pantoja: Don Luis fiancée

Don Gonzalo de Ulloa: Doña Ines' father

Don Diego Tenorio: Don Juan's father

Brigida: Doña Ines' governess/servant

Captain Centellas: friend of Don Juan

Don Rafael de Avellaneda: friend of Don Luis and later Don Juan

Marcos Ciutti: Don Juan's servant

Christofano Buttarelli: owner of the shop where the first scenes occur

Pascual: servant of the Pantoja family

Lucia: Doña Ana's maid

The Abbess of the convent where Doña Ines lives

The sculptor that makes the statues

Acts: Summary

Part One, Act One, Scenes I-XVI: Licentiousness and Scandal

Don Juan and Don Luis are scheduled to meet at Buttarelli's inn where a year earlier they had made a wager to see who could kill more men and seduce more women. Don Juan is seated at a table (wearing a mask) and writing a letter to Doña Ines. Don Juan leaves and Don Gonzalo enters. He has heard about the wager between Don Juan and Don Luis and wants to see for himself if the rumor is true. As he waits Don Diego arrives for the same purpose. At the appointed time several men have filled the inn in order to witness the tales of Don Juan and Don Luis and to get in on the wager themselves. Don Juan and Don Luis are both wearing masks and they begin their tales from the past year. Each pulls out a record sheet of the places they've been, the number of men killed and women seduced. Don Juan wins hands down. Don Luis concedes the loss and a new wager is made. Can Don Juan seduce Doña Ines and Doña Ana within six days? He takes the wager. Don Gonzalo and Don Diego both also wearing masks have been secretly listening and each approach Don Juan. Don Gonzalo tells Don Juan that he will not disgrace his daughter and family name in such a diabolical way. Don Juan laughs and belittles him. Don Gonzalo curses him. Don Diego approaches his son and is dismayed and disgusted by what he has overheard. He admonishes his son for his evil ways yet pardons him by the grace of God. Don Gonzalo and Don Diego agree that their deal is void. Both men leave together disheartened. Don Juan and Don Luis leave the inn and are duly arrested and thrown into jail.



Act Two, Scenes I-XII: Skill

Don Luis has been bailed out due to his being a nobleman. He quickly goes to Doña Ana's house to protect her from Don Juan's impending treachery. He implores Pascual to let him inside. Pascual agrees and tells him to return at 10 o'clock when everyone will be asleep. Don Juan is released from jail as well and first goes to Doña Ana's house where he meets Don Luis. Unbeknownst to Don Luis, Don Juan has his men with him. Don Luis is ready to defend Doña Ana's reputation and pulls his sword. Don Juan's men grab Don Luis and imprison him in Don Juan's wine cellar. Then Don Juan goes to the convent where Doña Ines has been cloistered for seventeen years. He is able through bribery of gold (two hundred pieces) convince Brigida (Doña Ines' servant) to leave him the key. At the end of act two Don Juan has set in motion the seduction of both Don Ines and Doña Ana.

Act Three, Scenes I-IX: Profanation

Brigida begins the manipulation of Doña Ines. She begins to extol the virtues of Don Juan and gives Doña Ines a book of verse. Doña Ines is terrified by what she hears. A letter concealed in the book falls out and Doña Ines reads it to her peril. She is overcome with emotion and doubts Don Juan's words of love and affection. Brigida convinces her that Don Juan is true to his word. Don Juan arrives and Doña Ines faints. With the help of Brigida, Don Juan kidnaps Doña Ines. Don Gonzalo arrives at the convent to warn the Abessa of Don Juan's scheme to steal Doña Ines away. Don Gonzalo was told that Brigida was overheard plotting with Don Juan's servant, Ciutti. The Abessa and Don Gonzalo find the letter from Don Juan and both flee in search of Doña Ines.

Act Four, Scenes I-XI: The Devil at the Gates of Heaven

The scene begins at Don Juan's estate near Seville. Don Juan has succeeded in getting Doña Ines to his estate with the help of Brigida and Ciutti. Brigida is able to get Doña Ines to admit that she loves Don Juan. Doña Ines begs her to help her escape. Doña Ines is terrified and wants to preserve her chastity. Don Juan enters and with his words of flattery convinces her she is safe and he will take her to her father in the morning. She believes him and goes to her room with



Brigida. Don Luis arrives in disguise requesting to see Don Juan about an urgent matter. He is admitted inside and then reveals himself. Don Luis feels that he has been ruined and he must regain his honor. Don Juan tries to dissuade him to no avail. Don Juan tells Don Luis to hide in a room so that he may see that Don Juan is not such a scoundrel. He has been told of Don Gonzalo's appearance at the estate. Don Gonzalo enters enraged. Don Juan is kneeling at Don Gonzalo's feet. He tries to persuade Don Gonzalo to let Ines marry him because through her virtuousness he will be saved. Don Gonzalo doesn't believe a word he says. Don Luis bursts out with a jeering laughter. Don Juan realizing his lies have no effect shoots Don Gonzalo dead. He then turns to Don Luis and the battle with Don Juan killing Don Luis too. He narrowly escapes the authorities as he jumps from a window into the river below. Upon hearing the commotion Brigida and Doña Ines enter and see that two men have been killed, one being her father. She is overcome with grief but does not want revenge for she loves Don Juan.

Part Two, Act One, Scenes I-VI: The Shade of Doña Ines

Don Juan returns to Seville after fleeing several years before. He finds that his father's palace has been turned into a pantheon for the people Don Juan has killed. He meets the sculptor and finds out that Doña Ines died from a broken heart. The sculptor doesn't know the cloaked stranger is Don Juan and retells the story of the infamous and evil Don Juan. Don Juan defends his actions of the past and raises the suspicion of the sculptor. Don Juan confesses his true identity, gives the sculptor some money and asks for the key to the pantheon. The sculptor wavers, Don Juan threatens him and he leaves. Don Juan begins talking to the statue of Doña Ines and he is filled with grief and sorrow for what he has done to her. A mist arrives and the statue of Doña Ines comes down from her pedestal and begins to implore Don Juan to change his ways in order to save both of their souls. Don Juan is convinced he is going mad and is hallucinating. Avellaneda and Centellas find Don Juan in the pantheon and are shocked by his dishevelment. He tells them what has occurred and the fear for his sanity. He invites both to have supper with him and they agree. He begins to mock Don Gonzalo and is admonished for being disrespectful to the dead. Don Juan then invites all the statues to join him for dinner. Don Juan shows no fear for the dead or of God.



Act Two, Scenes I-V: The Statue of Don Gonzalo

Don Juan, Captain Centellas and Avellaneda are seated at a richly set dining room table. They are in the former estate of Don Juan who earlier that day repurchased his property. The servant Ciutti serves the three men wine. Centellas and Avellaneda notice a fourth place setting. Don Juan explains it is for Don Gonzalo. The two men voice their concern for Don Juan's sanity. Soon a knock is heard outside and Ciutti, Centellas and Avellaneda become frightened. Don Juan orders the inside doors locked but the knocking continues and is soon inside the room. Ciutti flees, Centellas and Avellaneda both faint dead away. Don Juan pulls out his pistol as the statue of Don Gonzalo emerges through a closed door. The statue speaks and tells Don Juan that he has one day to live and in that time he must repent of his sins in order to enter heaven. Don Juan doesn't believe what he has seen and heard. He questions and ponders what the statue has said and wonders why he is given such a short time for his penance. Centellas and Avellaneda awaken and accuse Don Juan of drugging them. Don Juan in turn accuses them of setting up the

ruse as a bet between them and to drive him crazy. A heated accusation occurs between Don Juan, Centellas and Avellaneda. The men become enraged and a duel is agreed upon, Don Juan fighting both men together or individually.

Act Three, Scenes I-IV: God's Mercy and Love's Apotheosis

Don Juan is again in the pantheon and is met by the statue of Don Gonzalo. The statue tells Don Juan that the end of his life is near and in order to go to heaven he must repent his sins. Don Juan scoffs at this idea and laments that his young life will soon be over. He sees the hourglass is nearly empty and becomes panicked yet he does not repent. All the while Don Juan has believed that he has killed his two

dinner guests and that is enough evidence that he cannot change. He also does not believe in God or that he can receive any mercy. Spirits and skeletons emerge from the graves, the death bell tolls, chanting is heard, and Don Juan's courage fails him. The statue tells Don Juan that he is already dead, killed by Captain Centellas in their duel. Don Juan is astounded by this news. The statue of Don Gonzalo reaches his hand out to Don Juan to take him to hell. The statue of Doña Ines comes forth and implores Don Juan to seek the mercy of God. By the strength of her love for him, Don Juan asks God for mercy and his soul is saved. Both fall to the ground and their souls are taken to heaven.

Thought Provoking Questions

1. Why does José Zorrilla allow the character of Don Juan to lead such an evil life yet he is saved from hell in the end?
2. Was this play written for the nobles as an excuse for their excessive lives?
3. Was Zorrilla extolling the virtues and power of love?
4. Why does Doña Ines forgive Don Juan?
5. How was this play perceived by the Catholic Church?

The Porfiriato

The Porfiriato Period lasted from 1876 until 1910. José de la Cruz Porfirio Díaz Mori was the President of Mexico beginning on November 21, 1876 and held power directly or indirectly for the next thirty four years. He was a military man who created an illusion of democracy when in actuality it was a dictatorship. Order was maintained at all costs for the sake of progress. Force was used whenever necessary to neutralize opponents of the regime. Freedom of the press was nonexistent. The armies and the *rurales* became the forces of repression for the maintenance of the Porfirian peace during the Porfiriato. Mock elections were held at all levels of government while Díaz appointed his loyal friends as political bosses. Despite the modernization and economic growth Mexico remained a predominantly poor and rural country and class stratification became entrenched.



Period Prior to the Mexican Revolution

In 1883 the Mexican government began to seize private and communal land of the rural population. Taking advantage of an 1883 land law intended to encourage foreign investment; by 1888 land companies had obtained possession of more than 27.5 million hectares of rural land. A few hundred wealthy families held 54.3 million hectares of the country's most productive land, and more than half of all rural Mexicans worked on these families' huge haciendas. The wealthy families in Northern Mexico controlled the mining and ranching industries and the wealthy families in The Central Valley controlled the large-scale farms that grew wheat and grain. This land grab by the wealthy from the poor was one of many factors that disenfranchised the poor and led way to the Mexican Revolution.

The Mexican Embrace of European Culture

Throughout the 19th century, European culture was promoted in Mexico as being modern and the way of the future. Modernization was rooted in social and intellectual change but there was also the powerful push for economic growth and political change. Anything indigenous was viewed as old-fashioned and the rise of the middle class gave way to Mexicans craving anything European from fashion, music, cuisine and architecture. Imported European culture was highly valued and came with an expensive price tag, which made it even more desirable.



Before the war of independence in the early 19th century, Spanish culture heavily influenced Mexico, beginning with the conquistadors who imposed Iberian culture on the indigenous inhabitants of Mexico since the 15th century. For example, the rapid percussion of contemporary Latin music is in part derived from Spanish flamenco, and the use of brass in Mariachi music came from Spanish municipal bands. Europeans introduced wheat, pork, beef, sheep,

chicken and goats to the largely vegetarian, corn-based indigenous diet, which featured tamales, tortillas, moles, beans and chiles. The question, "corn or wheat tortillas?" literally represents a choice between indigenous and European cuisine.

After independence from Spain in 1821, other European nations had more influence. Many Germans moved to Texas and what is now Northern Mexico in the 1830s, leaving a musical legacy in the form of waltz and polka rhythms, the "oom-pa-pah" sound common in tejano, banda, conjunto, ranchera and norteño music, and the use of accordion. French influence grew in the latter part of the 19th century, during and after their occupation of Mexico (1862-1866). For example, the staple meat changed from mutton (the Spanish preference) to beef, in the French fashion. The French army suffered an initial defeat in the Battle of Puebla on May 5, 1862, now commemorated as Cinco de Mayo. Finally, with the 1910 revolution, Mexicans embraced mestizaje as the national identity, rejecting European theories of racial superiority and blending indigenous influences with various European ones. Folkórico and pre-Columbian food, music, dance and legends were reclaimed and celebrated.

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Day of the Dead

This is an ancient festivity that has been much transformed through the years, but which was intended in pre-Hispanic Mexico to celebrate children and the dead. Hence, the best way to describe this Mexican holiday is to say that it is a time when Mexican families remember their dead, and the continuity of life.

Two important things to know about the Mexican Day of the Dead (Día de los Muertos) are:

It is a holiday with a complex history, and therefore its observance varies quite a bit by region and by degree of urbanization. It is not a morbid occasion, but rather a festive time.

The original celebration can be traced to many Mesoamerican native traditions, such as the festivities held during the Aztec month of Miccaihuitontli, ritually presided by the "Lady of the Dead" (Mictecacihuatl), and dedicated to children and the dead. In the Aztec calendar, this ritual fell roughly at the end of the Gregorian month of July and the beginning of August, but in the post-conquest era it was moved by Spanish priests so that it coincided with the Christian holiday of All Hallows Eve (in Spanish: "Día de Todos Santos.") This was a vain effort to transform the observance from a profane to a Christian celebration. The result is that Mexicans now celebrate the day of the dead during the first two days of November, rather than at the

by Ricardo J. Salvador



beginning of summer. But remember the dead they still do, and the modern festivity is characterized by the traditional Mexican blend of ancient aboriginal and introduced Christian features.

Generalizing broadly, the holiday's activities consist of families (1) welcoming their dead back into their homes, and (2) visiting the graves of their close kin. At the cemetery, family members engage in sprucing up the gravesite, decorating it with flowers, setting out and enjoying a picnic, and interacting socially with other family and community members who gather there. In both cases, celebrants believe that the souls of the dead return and are all around them. Families remember the departed by telling stories about them. The meals prepared for these picnics are sumptuous, usually featuring meat dishes in spicy sauces, chocolate beverages, cookies, sugary confections in a variety of animal or skull shapes, and a special egg-batter bread ("pan de muerto," or bread of the dead). Gravesites and family altars are profusely decorated with flowers (primarily large, bright flowers such as marigolds and chrysanthemums), and adorned with religious amulets and with offerings of food, cigarettes and alcoholic beverages. Because of this warm social environment, the colorful setting, and the abundance of food, drink and good company, this commemoration of the dead has pleasant overtones for the observers, in spite of the open fatalism exhibited by all participants, whose festive interaction with both the living and the dead in an important social ritual is a way of recognizing the cycle of life and death that is human existence.

In homes, observant families create an altar and decorate it with items that they believe are beautiful and attractive to the souls of their departed ones. Such items include offerings of flowers and food, but also things that will remind the living of the departed (such as their photographs, a diploma, or an article of clothing), and the things that the dead prized and enjoyed while they lived. This is done to entice the dead and assure that their souls actually return to take part in the remembrance.

In very traditional settings, typically found only in native communities, the path from the street to the altar is actually strewn with petals to guide the returning soul to its altar and the bosom of the family. The traditional observance calls for departed children to be remembered during the first day of the festivity (the Day of the Little Angels, El día de los Angelitos), and for adults to be remembered on the second day. Traditionally, this is accompanied by a feast during the early morning hours of November the 2nd, the Day of the Dead proper, though modern urban Mexican families usually observe the Day of the Dead with only a special family supper featuring the bread of the dead. In southern Mexico, for example in the city of Puebla, it is good luck to be the one who bites into the plastic toy skeleton hidden by the baker in each rounded loaf. Friends and family members give one another gifts consisting of sugar skeletons or other items with a death motif, and the gift is more prized if the skull or skeleton is embossed with one's own name.

Another variation found in the state of Oaxaca is for the bread to be molded into the shape of a body or burial wrap, and for a face to be embedded on one end of the loaf. During the days leading up to and following the festivity, some bakeries in heavily aboriginal communities cease producing the wide range of breads that they typically sell so that they can focus on satisfying the demand for bread of the dead.

The Day of the Dead can range from being a very important cultural event, with defined social and economic responsibilities for participants (exhibiting the socially equalizing behavior that social



anthropologists would call redistributive feasting, e.g. on the island of Janitzio in Michoacan state), to being a religious observance featuring actual worship of the dead (e.g., as in Cuilapan, Oaxaca, an ancient capital of the Zapotec people, who venerated their ancestors and whose descendants do so to this day, an example of many traditional practices that Spanish priests pretend not to notice), to simply being a uniquely Mexican holiday characterized by special foods and confections (the case in all large Mexican cities.) In general, the more urban the setting within Mexico the less religious and cultural importance is retained by observants, while the more rural and Indian the locality the greater the religious and economic import of the holiday. Because of this, this

observance is usually of greater social importance in southern Mexico than in the northern part of the country.

Further reading

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