



FILM REVIEW: "Don Juan de Marco"

At the conclusion of the film, "Don Juan de Marco," the psychiatrist Dr. Mikler (Marlon Brando) asks, "How shall we end our fable?..." "Why not?" He then answers himself. Thus, Don Juan de Marco (Johnnie Depp) finds his lost love, and Dr. Mikler rediscovers happiness with his long time wife (Faye Dunaway).

This film is beautifully made. The scene of Don Juan's last seduction before his planned suicide rivals in comedic grace Meg Ryan's "orgasm" scene in the restaurant in "When Harry Met Sally:"

"So you're Don Juan, the great lover? Right!" sneers the beautiful, urbane woman waiting in the restaurant, following the masked cavalier's having introduced himself.

"No woman has left me unsatisfied," he replies demurely, "nor have I ever forced myself on anyone." Guess what happens.

As the tale unfolds, Don Juan tells his life story from the beginning. His parents fell in love at first sight. Later, the husband of Don Juan's first lover kills Don Juan's father. Don Juan avenges his father's death. Then he must flee from his village. His mother becomes a nun. Don Juan's adventures (precisely 1502 seductions) eventually lead him to lose his true love and this he cannot bear. Thus he intends to end his life at 21. Enter Dr. Mikler (Marlon Brando) alias Don Ottavio de Flores. Most of the film takes place in a psychiatric hospital from which Dr. Mikler is about to retire. He takes on Don Juan as his last patient, and a mutual cure takes place.

As in all healings, there is a mutual need and cross fertilization that occur between Don Juan and his doctor. C. G. Jung wrote, "Only the wounded physician heals." In routine psychotherapy, the patient's attempt to heal the therapist often goes unnoticed. At least I have trouble seeing it in my own patients. However, I regularly see it in the patients of my supervisees.

The deepest understanding of psychotherapy takes into account every person's wish to heal themselves and others. For example, every child attempts to calm and heal their mother. There are also omnipresent negative wishes to fail, to regress, and to destroy. For example, by not getting better, a patient triumphs over his therapist by making him impotent. Fortunately, as in this case, most therapies end with mutually positive outcomes. Don Juan gives Dr. Mikler life. Dr. Mikler admits that he needs Don Juan so that he can breathe, having allowed his life to be sucked out of him by routine.

Dr. Mikler also gives Don Juan his life, by interrupting his suicide. The two then go on to create a way for Don Juan to live in the



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real world. He learns to accept the dual nature of existence — he is both Don Juan and an ordinary man.

The power of the love of Don Juan will not be denied. He sees the Goddess within every woman. His vision and imagination transcend ordinary reality. And under his caress, beauty that lies hidden everywhere within begins to bloom. This is the message of the film. Whether we see a psychiatric ward or a Spanish nobleman's villa depends not on so called objective reality, but on ourselves, our vision, creativity, and courage.

And oh how smoothly does the bon bon concocted of this spiritual chestnut filling go down! The script is engrossing and witty, the direction crisp, and the old pro players do not disappoint, in either leading or supportive roles (for example, the staff psychiatrists). Wonderful cinematography makes the colors vibrate on the screen. Finally, Johnnie Depp deserves an Oscar for his portrayal of Don Juan, whose fiery, mercurial nature eventually gives way to reveal a depressed and abandoned child.

Ultimately this movie asks, what is real? The grinding routine of our modern rat race, or the world of the spirit, the world of love? That this love includes the physical love of women titillates at first, then rises to a higher plane — from the sensuous curve of a woman's hips, to the eternal smell of her perfume, to the gentle hope in her heart. This is the true meaning of comedy: Life is absurd, but there is always the possibility of radiance in ordinary reality. It is a rare film that can take us there and make us smile. □

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