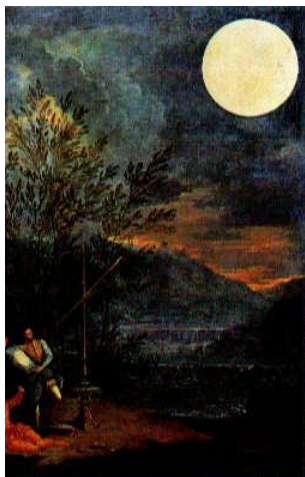
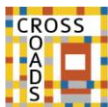


MIGUEL MAÑARA

A play by Oscar Vladislav de Lubicz-Milosz



Comments by Monsignor Luigi Giussani



CROSSROADS
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Miguel Mañara is the real Don Giovanni – he was an historical figure in the mid-sixteen hundreds. He is the Spanish Don Giovanni who gave rise to all the “Don Giovanni” characters later invented. He is rich – in all senses – in all conceivable talents and possibilities and, therefore, is hopelessly arrogant. Everything is due to him, and everything must serve his pleasure and his opinion. Violence, in the most subtle and masked sense, is the law of his life. The knights of the king’s court respect him as “the best.” He’s much younger than the others.

The play opens with a party given in Miguel’s honor. The guests invite Miguel to remember all his bold adventures, above all his adventures with women of any type and social class. And he answers. However, at the climax of the admiration hailed on him by the others – having cried out: “Glory to Mañara, glory to Mañara, in the depths of hell!” – Miguel suddenly says:

I am pleased to see, sirs, that you all love me a lot, and I am deeply moved by the heartfelt wish you express of seeing my flesh and my spirit burning alive in a new flame, very far from here. I swear before you on my honor and on the head of the Bishop of Rome that your hell does not exist, and has never burned except in the mind of a mad Messiah or of an evil monk.

But we know that in God’s empty space there are worlds illumined by a joy warmer than ours, unexplored and wonderful lands that are very, very far from this one. So, go ahead and choose one of these far and delightful planets, and send me there, this very night, through the grave’s greedy door.

For time passes slowly, sirs, terribly slowly, and I am strangely tired of this bitch of a life. Not to reach God is certainly a tiny thing, but to lose Satan is a great sorrow and a huge bore, by my faith!

I have drawn Love into pleasure, into the mud, and into death; I have been a traitor, a blasphemmer, an executioner; I have done all that a poor devil of a man can do, and look! I have lost Satan. I eat the bitter herb of the rock of boredom; I have served Venus angrily, then maliciously, and disgustedly. Today I would yawn as I twisted her neck. And it is not vanity speaking through my mouth. I do not pose as an insensitive executioner. I've suffered; I've suffered a lot. Anguish has winked his eye at me; jealousy has whispered into my ear, pity has grabbed me by the throat. Really, these were the least deceptive among my pleasures.

So! My confession takes you by surprise; I hear some of you laughing. Know then that there is no-one who ever committed a truly shameful action who did not cry over his victim. Certainly in my young years, I too sought, just as you do, the miserable joy, the endless stranger who gives you her life without telling you her name. But the desire was soon born in me to pursue what you'll never know: a love immense, dark and sweet. More than once I thought I had caught it, and it was only a ghostly flame. I'd embrace it, with an oath I'd promise it eternal tenderness, it would burn my lips and cover my head with my own ashes, and when I'd open my eyes again, there was only the horrible day of loneliness, the long, endless day of loneliness, with a poor heart in its hands, a poor, poor sweet heart, as light as a sparrow in winter. And one evening, the vile-eyed and low-browed lust came to sit on my bed, and looked at me in silence, as if looking at a dead man.

Do you know what I need, sirs? A new beauty, a new sorrow, a new love that I'll soon be fed up with in order to taste

*better the wine of a new evil, a new life, an infinity of new lives.
That's what I need, sirs, nothing else.*

*Ab, how do I fill up this emptiness in life? What can I do?
For the desire is always there, stronger and madder than ever.
It's like a fire in the sea that blasts its flame into the deep
universal black emptiness. It is a desire to embrace the infinite
possibilities. Ab sirs, what are we doing here? What do we gain?
Ab, how short is this life according to science! And, as for weapons,
this poor world wouldn't have enough to satisfy the appetites of a lord
like me; and as far as good works are concerned, you know what
troublesome dogs, what a stinking brood of rats men are; and
certainly you know too that a King is a very poor thing once God has
gone away.*

There is no difference between this cry of Miguel and this other great sentence of Andre' Gide in *The Fruits of the Earth*: "Desire! I have dragged you with me along the highroads; I have denied you in the fields; I have sated you with drink in the big towns--sated you without quenching your thirst; I have bathed you in moonlight nights; I have taken you with me wherever I went; I have cradled you on the waves; I have lulled you to sleep on the high seas.... Desire! Desire! What more can I do for you? What more do you want? Will you never weary?"

The eldest person at Miguel's party is, among those present, the only wise and well-balanced man. He is a friend of Miguel's father and he has the perception that the thirty-something son of his friend is going through a horrible and desperate moment in his life. He has an intuition and imagines Miguel in another of his friend's house, who has only one daughter, Girolama, a very young, intelligent, beautiful, direct, and serene woman.

In the second scene there is the dialogue between Miguel and Girolama. Girolama is a presence, the “Presence”: “*Why – says Miguel – didn’t I learn earlier that I have a good soul?*” It’s a presence, in fact, that makes possible one’s self-awareness.

The whole dialogue – which should be read again word by word (so intense and great it is) – is the event of the change for Miguel.

DON MIGUEL

You love flowers, Girolama? And I don’t see them in your hair or on your person.

GIROLAMA

It is because I love flowers that I do not like girls who adorn themselves with them, as with silk or lace or colorful feathers. I never put flowers in my hair (it’s beautiful enough, thank God!) Flowers are beautiful living beings that we must let live and breathe the air of the sun and of the moon. I never pick flowers. We can very well love, in this world where we are, without wanting immediately to kill the one we love, or to imprison it behind glass, or, as people do with birds, to lock them up in a cage in which water no longer tastes like water and summer seeds no longer taste like seeds.

DON MIGUEL

So everything is honey, and dew, and balm of sweetness in you, Girolama? Is there no dark corner in your heart? Do you never get angry?

GIROLAMA

But yes, yes! And even against these flowers, I like so much, because their Latin names are so hard to remember. They have earned me an infinite number of lectures from our abbot, who, instead of contenting himself with being a good geometrician, dedicates himself to botany, too, to my great misfortune.

You were telling me awhile ago that my life was sad; I don't agree at all. There is the house, there is the garden, the daily lesson, and there are the poor. There are many, a great many poor people in Seville. I have no time to get bored. And then there are books. You see, I am the one who reads to my father. I know almost all our poets, and recently we acquired "The Adventures of the Illustrious Knight of La Mancha". My father and the abbot laughed a lot, and I wanted to cry. How beautiful are the books that make you laugh and cry at the same time!

But maybe I am stretching your patience too long, Don Miguel, and you must be judging me very dull and garrulous. You look a bit surprised at seeing me so happy. Do not reproach me for this peace of mind and heart, for I neglect none of my duties.

DON MIGUEL

I was the one, Girolama, who asked you to tell me the story of your dear life. Oh sweet life, oh beautiful and sad flower! Do not withdraw your hand; leave it here on my heart. Let the beating of my heart manage to tell you what I don't dare entrust to my voice. I've so many things to tell you! I am so changed from the day we met! It was at the church of Caridad, remember? Around Palm Sunday, before I left for Madrid; and that same evening Don Fernando, your father's old friend, pushed me by the shoulders into this house which I feared, because you knew my life, you knew of my life what can be revealed to a young girl, and it is a lot, I'm afraid, it is too much, Girolama.

GIROLAMA

I spoke to Don Fernando, maybe I should not confess these things to you, I spoke to Don Fernando about you. I'm no longer a child and I think that nothing is better than beautiful frankness. And Don Fernando spoke to me about you. You know how he is, our old friend Don Fernando: a bit of a teaser, but a good fellow. He pulled my leg (he knew me as a baby), then suddenly he changed his tone, and even his expression. And he spoke to me about you.

DON MIGUEL

Alas, Girolama! There is no remedy to this sadness of the heart! What's done is done. Because life is like that. What's done is done.

GIROLAMA

I don't agree in the least. I see nothing so terrible in this. I know you are a bad lot, who has made many ladies cry, and beautiful ones, too. But all these women knew they were doing wrong in loving you, and even in allowing you to love them. For you have given none of them the oath, the great oath that binds for eternity, Don Miguel; and you had given none of them the ring, the ring that unites soul to soul forever, Don Miguel. Ah, they knew very well what they were doing, all of them, yes, all of them!

DON MIGUEL

Silence! Your voice frightens me, Girolama! It is as if a summer-beam suddenly penetrated into a place protected by the wings of night, full of crawling shapes, of things dreamt of by the sickness of darkness. One day I saw a Sister of Mercy pushing her way all alone into the cell of those condemned to death. This how your voice advances, Girolama, into my evil heart.

GIROLAMA

It is because you take me for a stupid little girl; it is because you don't know me well, Don Miguel. And also, it is because I am small and weak, and I am sure you feel a great compassion for me, fearing you could break my wing or my little paw. But I give you leave to speak to me freely. I am not afraid of you. Something in my heart tells me I'm your sister, I am not afraid of your eyes. No, Miguel, your look does not frighten me. I know well that at times, you are watching me as one watches a small animal he wants to catch, and it always makes me laugh when I think of it. You say woman is weak; all men say it, I think, for my father says it, and the abbot says it, and Don Fernando. And books say so, too. It's a fact, woman is weak, but like the bird in the air and the small mouse in the fields: it is not enough just to

want to in order to catch it. And women know very well what they are doing, come off it, and don't let themselves be taken except when God is no longer in their heart, and then it's no longer worth while taking them. I know well what I say and do, otherwise, would I have come here, alone? I took great interest in letting you know me, Don Miguel. For you, I know you. Three months have passed since the day we met (at Caridad, Don Miguel); and you certainly were not then as you are now.

DON MIGUEL

Yes, Girolama, what you say is true; I am not what I was. I see better: yet I was not blind; perhaps it was the light that was missing; for the exterior light is a small thing; it is not the one that enlightens our life. You have lit a lamp in my heart; and here I am, like the sick man who falls asleep in darkness with the embers of fever on his forehead and the ice of desertion in his heart, and who suddenly wakes up in a beautiful room in which everything is immersed in the discreet music of light; and he sees the friend he has mourned for many years...a friend who saves him from the flood of darkness! Behold what a place of peace you've changed my heart into, Girolama! My sweetest sister! For, a while ago you said you were my sister, didn't you?

GIROLAMA

You are the man saved from the flood of darkness, and you are weak and pale and still stupefied, and it is well and necessary that a sister should think for you and speak for you and support you on the way, and should pray to God for you. Aren't you the man saved from the bitter water? And then, certainly I am your sister.

DON MIGUEL

But if you truly are my sweet sister, Girolama, precisely my... No, I cannot say it, my voice is no longer my voice, my heart is no longer my heart, my life is no longer my life... Girolama, give me your weak hand, your dearest hand of a friend, of a sister, of a holy spouse!

GIROLAMA

Are you talking to a young girl or to a woman? Beware, for heaven is listening, Don Miguel.

DON MIGUEL

I am talking to a woman under the shining sky of my joy, under the heavens suspended above our heads like a perfumed vault. I am talking to you, Girolama! Who are very great, so very great as to make me afraid? What have I done with my life, what have I done with my heart? Why didn't I learn earlier that I have a good soul? Will you forgive me?

GIROLAMA

I will have to forgive you. Get up.

DON MIGUEL

What about your hand?

GIROLAMA

I will have to give it to you.

DON MIGUEL

What about your heart? Are you going to refuse it to my joy? Tell me, what about your heart?

GIROLAMA

My heart is no longer mine.

DON MIGUEL

And your great purity, and your own holiness, will you entrust them to me, for as long as Time, for as long as Life lasts?

GIROLAMA

For as long as Eternity.

DON MIGUEL

And do you love me? Do you love me with a devoted love before men, before men?

GIROLAMA

Before God

The tones of the drama don't diminish the truth of this upright presence to each another. It's a rebirth: "*There is no remedy to this sadness of heart! What's done is done. Because life is like that. What's done is done,*" Miguel says at a certain point in the dialogue. And Girolama replies, "*I don't agree in the least.*" There is a Presence on account of which the past, with all its evil, becomes a life, a different life. By means of this Presence, the past becomes the truth of the very existence that was ignored before: "*Why I didn't learn earlier that I have a good soul?*"

And it is like the recovery of the world. It is like someone who exits the darkness for the first time and sees, finally sees. And the embrace of everything becomes possible, the embrace of what was distant, of what was lost, and of what was near but was never seen. Girolama is for Miguel the sign of the Presence that makes him able to embrace everything, the Presence that raises him up in a universal embrace. These factors belong to the structure of our life. To a different extent, each of us in his life has had a presentiment of these things. Indeed, what is each of us for the other person if not this companionship that cherishes and cares for the other's destiny? But what are you for her? And what is he for you? If you don't aspire, if you don't freely allow your heart to journey toward the ideal, to walk toward this different life, then, what are you if not a lump in which the other, messing up, seeks just a response to his/her instinct or state of soul?

At a certain point, Girolama says, "*We can very well love, in this world where we are, without wanting immediately to kill the one we love,*" or without desiring to grab this love in order to

possess it, in order to block it. Rather than helping each other on the journey towards destiny, one murders the other.

After three months of marriage, Girolama unexpectedly dies.

Thus, Miguel finds himself almost suspended over a vertiginous abyss where he no longer has support, no longer has a presence. And he can't go back to his prior way of life because once you've glimpsed certain things, you can't return to your old way of life. The presence is no longer there, but what that presence gave him as a presentiment, remains. He can no longer deny the truth of the world, the view of his journey, his life's destiny. But where can this destiny be found? So, desperate, seeking for support and companionship, begging for a presence, he knocks at the door of a convent.

The fourth scene of the drama is the dialogue between Miguel and the Abbot, who is another aspect, another form, of the same companionship. The core of this speech, of this dialogue, lies in the impetuous unveiling of what prayer is. This is the possibility of companionship that, in any moment and condition of life whatsoever, makes the person sense the presence that cannot fail. And makes the person sense all the precariousness and limit of the human presence, which is a sign of the Presence with a capital P.

In Girolama – a fragile woman who dies – or in the powerful figure of the Abbot – who is prevented by the great monastic rule, from accompanying him step by step – even the limit of human companionship, which is a sign of the Companionship, becomes a part of him and doesn't vanish, no longer withdraws. Thus, the sign becomes ever more powerful the more it might seem to slip away. Don Miguel makes his confession, crying out in despair over himself and his life, which is dominated by shame for his evil. The presence of Girolama, the absence of Girolama makes all the vomit of his past life return.

THE ABBOT

Come on, come on, do not cry, my son. No! He does not want to smile, my begging monk. I cannot get a smile out of him! Don't you understand then, my son? The fact is you are thinking of things that are no more (and that never were, my son).

But is it necessary to repeat to you that you have come, that you are here, that all is well? What is there in that head of his, Lord?

DON MIGUEL

How can you read my heart in this way, Father? You did not even give me time to open it all to you. How do you read my heart, a closed book, like this, Father?

THE ABBOT

Get up. This way you have a strange air. And stop embracing my knees. Can't you keep quiet? I'll have your cell prepared. Do you hear me? I want to have you very close. Your nights will be very long, deserted, and hard; just wait a bit, man dressed in vanity! You are going to find out what it's all about, and you are going to know how a man prays, alone, at night, between four walls of eternity. Ah, it is not your fountains of tears under the moon, these prayers among four walls that pretend to be deaf, these litanies virgin of thought and naked of reason, and as long as the shadow of love that escapes. I want to have you very close. But you will never call for me. Understand? You will only say to yourself, the Father is there, behind these walls that never dream. The Father is there, he is old, and he sleeps on his three planks. And I, I am all alone with the heart of stone, and I breathe my prayers into the ear of stone. For you men dressed with colors say that walls have ears for your plots and your blasphemies. But here, where life is a thing very different from a smile in the lipstick or a woman's tear fallen on glass, here the stones are full of a patience that waits and a waiting that listens.

DON MIGUEL

Dark cell! Image of my heart! Lovable mortifications! Silence of catacombs! How I love you already!

THE ABBOT

Love and haste do not agree, Mañara. It is by patience that love is measured. A pace both regular and sure: this is the pace of love, that walks between two jasmine hedges, arm in arm with a girl, or alone between two rows of tombs. Patience. You have not come here, sir, to be tortured. Life is long here. Infancy and education are needed, youth and teaching, a maturity curious about the right weight of things, and a slow old age in love with the grave. With what prudence must we move then! For the burning hair-shirt has no love for the violence that quenches the blood's itching, and you must keep very still in a short, narrow coffin, when you huddle in it with the sound desire to sleep an hour or two in a sleep as empty and as deep as the instant.

To let your own blood is something sweetly fiendish; and sleeplessness consumes the heart. Now, life is long here, you understand. And too exasperated a hunger is a temptation. You must chew the foul grass and the lukewarm root like an animal which has before it beautiful meadows and long, long hours of summer.

And you must talk to Eternity with precious and clear syllables even at night, when its love grabs you by the throat like a murderer.

Know too that it is an excellent thing to remain faithful to the word that was ordered, a dam of granite for the bitter waters of your love! For it is necessary that prayer be a fast before it is a banquet, and nakedness of heart before it is a mantle of heaven buzzing with worlds. Perhaps a day will come when God allows you to enter brutally, like an axe, into the flesh of the tree, and to fall madly like a stone, into the night of the water, and to slip,

singing like fire, into the heart of metal. All this can well come one day, dear son, when the snake has changed his skin.

[That is to say, when the perception of God and of Christ have become nearly transparent in the plant, in the tree and in the water; when the Mystery that is the core of the plant, of the water, of the earth and the sky, that is, the heart of everything, is no longer separated from anything, as if the veil had fallen, like when you see the outline traced by the body that is behind the veil.]

But one must start from the beginning: this is essential. To bite the stone and to bark: Lord, Lord, Lord! Is to serve, weeping, a heartless woman. You must leave this to the betrayed who sigh a night, or six months, or ten years.

Life is long here.

You will beware therefore of inventing prayers. You will sing humbly with the book of the poor in spirit. And you will wait.

From the last nightly spark of your madness, the first dawn will spring up!

The crater of the heart cries and thunders and the black vomit will leave the cloud, then fall back in grey famine on the field and the vineyard. The prayer that devastates passion is like that. But when the heart has fallen asleep in the balm of the years, when the flesh has died and the blood has gone pale and when the marrow has gone dry, and when love is past and when sorrow is past, when love and sorrow and hatred have become ghosts that the sword penetrates as it does water and in which the lip hits nothing more than its own wound, as in molten glass, it is then that you speak to God no longer of yourself and of your own miserable unhappiness, but of man, and of the foam, and of the sand, and of the wind and the rain! Do you know which saint said, Behold brother wind and sister rain?

O my son, if you knew what things man can tell God when man's flesh becomes a cry, the cry of God worshipping Himself!

You do not have the face of a man who is listening, Miguel. You are thinking too much of your own sorrow. Why do you seek sorrow? Why are you afraid of losing what has managed to find you? Penance is not sorrow. It is love.

And the abbot leaves the scene. Now Mañara is alone and, after a long life in the convent, the final soliloquy begins.

Look at the moon, look at the earth, look at man so weak and at his great sorrow. And yet, despite all these things that are, I dare not say that You are.

Who am I then that I should dare say that You are? I am not sure, I have no right to be sure of anything apart from one: of my love, of my love, of my blind love for You. Nothing is pure, except my love for You, nothing is great, except my love for You. The dream has vanished; the passion has run away, the remembrance was cancelled. Love has remained. Nothing is sincere, except my love for You; nothing is real, except my love for You, nothing is immortal, except my love for You.

For I am nothing but one dead man among the dead whom I have loved, I am nothing but a name that fills the mouth of the living with sand. What's left is Love. Ah, Beauty! the sad, poor Beauty! But I want to praise Beauty, for it is from it that Sorrow is born, the beloved of the Beloved. Your great love burns my heart, your great love my sole certainty. O tears! O hunger for eternity! O joy! Alas! Forgive! Alas! Love me!

There are great people and petty people, there are grown ups and there are children, but the story line of humanity, the story line of the heart is in the grown up as well as it is in the child. We are children, but we are called for this journey, where nothing is lost, nothing is forgotten, and, above

all, nothing is renounced. On the contrary, everything is regained, everything is finally found. From the appearance of beauty, the sadness that redeems it comes about, and, finally, love comes about. The word “love” has no chance whatsoever of being ambiguous: to love is to affirm with the wonder of all one’s being, the Other, the Destiny, and this presence of the Destiny, this sign, this body of the destiny that is other people and the sky, and the earth, and everything that happens. My happiness, my sorrow and my evil become worthy of love! Everything is new. “Everything is new,” says Saint Paul. Behold, the old has passed away, it no longer exists. We are children. There’s nothing to forget or renounce; there’s no mutilation. There is only a resurrection.

Let us pray to the Lord, who has given us Being, the Father, He who is our Destiny, the original consistency of our life and its meaning; let us pray to Him through whom we are born in every instant, that He may make of our lives a mature fruit, that He may make us great, that He may make us run the whole length of the journey. Let us pray, let us ask God.

Prayer, let’s remember, is asking Christ and that’s it. Because within that, there’s father, mother, brother, sister, husband, wife, boyfriend, girlfriend, friend, companion, man, sky, and earth. It’s there within. This, indeed, is the formula of the truth: “God, all in all.” It’s the formula of existence towards the explosion of that truth: “Christ, everything in everyone,” that is, the Mystery of our companionship, the fragile and precarious but true sign of His Presence.