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Dramatic Publishing



Life's a Dream

Drama / Comedy
by
Pedro Calderón de la Barca

Adapted
by
Adrian Mitchell and John Barton

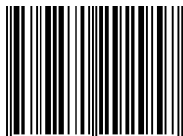


The Dramatic Publishing Company

Life's a Dream

Cast: 5m, 2w, extras. Frank Rich of the *New York Times* wrote, "*Life's a Dream* the Calderón metaphysical masterpiece, is one of the finest fruits of the 17th century Golden Age of Spanish drama ... an ever pertinent play, a pre-Freudian reverie about the power of free will." "...The action concerns the Polish King's incarceration of his son, Sigismund, who the omens say will prove a tyrant. In a controlled experiment, Sigismund becomes prince for a day, justifies the prophecies and is shunted back into his tower: only after he persuades himself that all that has passed is a dream, the young prince re-emerges to take over the kingdom and learn to rule wisely. Intertwined with this is the story of a Muscovite woman, who comes to Poland to avenge herself in her father and her lover, and who likewise learns the power of magnanimity and kindness..." wrote Michael Billington in the *Guardian*.

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Life's a Dream

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LIFE'S A DREAM

by
CALDERÓN

Adapted
by
ADRIAN MITCHELL
and
JOHN BARTON



Dramatic Publishing

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INTRODUCTION

Calderón de la Barca

or How I learned to stop worrying and love the Spanish Golden Age.

This introduction is not for scholars. They know far more about Calderón than I do. It is for those people who find themselves intimidated by the strangeness of Spain, even contemporary Spain, let alone the 17th Century Spain.

I felt that same nervousness only a few years ago. When I first read about the plays of the Spanish Golden Age—from around 1500 to 1681, the period in which Calderón, Lope de Vega, Cervantes, Tirso de Molina and Rojas Zorilla flourished—I was dumbfounded by the system of values, especially the “Honour” system which seemed to dominate the drama. It was only when I began to read the plays thoroughly that I discovered that you have to know very little about such matters to understand many of the greatest plays. Honour is such a strange word in England these days. Good name and reputation are still far easier to handle.

But when you read or act or watch *The Mayor of Zalamea* you need to know about human beings, not about social codes. Of course, the more you know about the social background the more you’ll understand and enjoy. But most of us live in a world which doesn’t allow time for historical research in between work or looking for work and going to the theatre. *The Mayor of Zalamea* was the first Spanish play I attempted, using a literal translation by Gwenda Pandolfi, sticking very closely to the text, using a kind of syllabic verse. This was commissioned by the National Theatre. When I read the play for the second time I knew that given a half-decent production, it must be popular. Michael Bogdanov’s production was spare and strong and had at its centre a perfor-

mance of pure gold by Michael Bryant. The production proved that there is no difficulty for an English audience with at least one of the Golden Age plays. It started at the Cottesloe and transferred to the Olivier because more seats were needed.

After its success the National suggested another Calderón, *Life's a Dream*. But just as I was completing my version it was discovered that the Royal Shakespeare Company was about to stage a version of the same play by John Barton. I rang John, whom I didn't know at the time, to confirm that this was true, since the National had decided to scrap its plans. He is the most generous of bears and said something like: "Come on over and I'll show you mine and you show me yours." We both liked each other's versions. He'd solved problems I had been stumped by. I'd laid down some mean verse. John suggested mixing the versions together and that's what we did. He kept a kind of record of whose line was whose and it worked out about forty-six per cent John, forty-six per cent Adrian and eight per cent lines which were a mixture of the two. His production was highly acclaimed both in Stratford and London and once again the availability of Spanish drama to an English audience was proved.

The Great Theatre of the World was commissioned by the Mediaeval Players. The metaphor of the play, in which God is a theatre director and the World is his stage manager appealed to me strongly. So did the humour and the pathos and the poetic wonder of the play—it is a Christian play but a pretty undogmatic one, naturally, since Calderón could take it for granted that he had a Christian audience.

The theatre is a real world. This has advantages and disadvantages. One given factor for this production was that the Players have developed many circus skills like juggling and stilt-walking. We used this by giving the play an interlude

half way through in which, since the play is much possessed by death, skeletons danced and played, giant skeletons walked on bone-like stilts and juggler skeletons demonstrated their art with skulls and bones. Disadvantages—the Players' grant couldn't stretch to a complete cast. One character, I was told, had to be left out. I chose the one which I felt was least relevant to a modern audience, the character Discretion, who chooses a contemplative life. Don't blame me, blame Mrs. Thatcher. I suppose I could have written back Discretion into the play for this published edition. I decided not to. This is a version for Philistine Britain where even a very funny and affecting play about eternal truths has to lose, if not a limb, then a few fingers in the cause of cost-effectiveness.

Calderón lived from 1600 to 1681. To find out about his life and work, read his entry in the "Oxford Companion to Spanish Literature" and Gerald Brenan's wonderful "The Literature of the Spanish People."

His work is sometimes characterised as formal, intellectual, spiritual, maybe somewhat cold. All these things are true, but there is far more to his plays. They're certainly not cold, they simply seem comparatively cool when you place them beside the red-hot passion of Lope de Vega. But there is a slow-burning passion in Calderón and also a lovely humour which is often forgotten. Lope de Vega (1562-1635) was surely a mixture of earth and fire. Calderón is air and water, a most beautiful fountain. And often, a fiery fountain.

ADRIAN MITCHELL

This collection is dedicated to all the theatre people involved in the first productions of these versions, with many thanks and much admiration.

This version of *Life's a Dream* was first performed at The Other Place, Stratford-upon-Avon on 23 November 1983 with the following cast:

Rosaura Barbara Kellermann
Clarion Anthony O'Donnell
Sigismund Miles Anderson
Clotaldo David Waller
Astolfo Christopher Neame
Estrella Lesley Duff
Basilio Charles Kay
Soldiers, Courtiers, Servants Jeremy Wilkin
Richard Garnett
David Killick
Cyril Nri

Musicians Michael Tubbs
Bryan Allen
Peter Hopkins
Clifford Pick

Director John Barton
Designer Christopher Morley
Lighting Leo Leibovici
Music Guy Woolfenden
Voice work Cicely Berry
David Carey
Music Director Michael Tubbs
Design Assistant Jill Jowett
Stage Manager Titus Grant
Deputy Stage Manager Helen Lovat-Fraser
Assistant Stage Manager Peter Miller

Based on literal versions by
Lucy Woolley and Gwenda Pandolfi.

LIFE'S A DREAM

A Play in Three Acts
For Five Men and Two Women, Extras

CHARACTERS

ROSAURA a confused woman
CLARION a foolish servant
SIGISMUND Prince of Poland
CLOTALDO his keeper
ASTOLFO Duke of Muscovy
ESTRELLA Princess of Poland
BASILIO King of Poland
SOLDIERS
COURTIERS
SERVANTS

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

(A stage. Enter ROSAURA dressed as a man. She mounts a hobby horse and rides gently. Drums and trumpets sound suddenly and the horse neighs and goes wild. She tries to control it but it careers round the stage. She falls off.)

ROSAURA. You're not a horse,
 You're a hippogriff.
 Why have you thrown me?
 Coward, you shied and bucked
 At a shadow, a nothing.
 Flash without flame!
 Fish without scales!
 Bird without feathers!
 You threw me on these rocks.
 Stay in the mountains then:
 Make friends with the wolves.
 But what about me?
 I'm lost...
 Somewhere in Poland.
 Somewhere in the mountains.
 I'm a stranger.
 I am tired from riding,
 The sun is going down
 And I've nobody for company
 But Clarion the Clown.

(Enter CLARION.)

CLARION. So this is Poland. What a place.
About as friendly as outer space.
Up there black crags, down there a gloomy
lake.
I'm hungry and thirsty and my shoulders
ache.

ROSAURA. Trouble breeds trouble. We must endure it.

CLARION. A hogshead of wine is the best way to cure it.
Why did we leave our Muscovite nest
To trudge round Europe on some crazy quest?

ROSAURA. You know very well
Why we've come to Poland:
To find my lost father
And win back my honour.

CLARION *(sings)*.

I never had a father
But if I had have done
I'm sure he would have told me:
"Be a man of honour, son."

So I rose up one morning
And hurried to the fair,
For I had heard the rumour
That the folk sold honour there.

As I walked through the fairground
My heart was struck by fear.

I heard a giant shouting
"Come and buy your honour here."

I asked him for some honour.
He laughed and turned away,
Said: "Honour is expensive
Son, are you prepared to pay?"

"You pay your legs, your eyesight,
Your land, your house, your wife,
Your sanity, your children
And your money and your life."

I told him: "Keep your honour:
I don't want to be dead."
So I went and found a tavern
And I bought some wine instead.

ROSAURA. Clarion, look there;
Look...do you see?
A tower hewn out of massive blocks
Lies at the centre of a maze of rocks
Like a chunk hewn out of solid midnight,
Or a great mill for grinding sunlight:
A tower darker than darkness.
(*Sound of chains.*)

CLARION. Rosaura. Listen. Clanking.

ROSAURA. I can't move. I'm freezing.
I can't move. I'm burning.

SIGISMUND (*cries out within*).

I am unhappy.

CLARION. Let us leave this tower.

ROSAURA. Look. A flickering. A gleam
In the blackness. Shifting, shimmering.
There's a man, a wild man,
In a tomb there or a dungeon.
Let's hear what he has to say.

(SIGISMUND comes forward, chained. He is carrying a picture-book.)

SIGISMUND. What have I done that I should suffer so?
What crime have I committed? Tell me, stars.
I have been born. Is that a crime in men?
Were other men not born as I was born?
Yet they are blessed and I have here no
blessings.

(Turns over the pages of the book.)

A bird is born, a swallow,
Little and damp and shaken,
It grows so bright and dark and feathery,
A spray of flowers on the wing.
It slices through the air so speedily
That it outflies imagining
And leaves its nest forsaken.
Then why can't I
Be like a swallow flying free?
(He turns the page to a picture of a salmon.)
A fish is born, a salmon.
Child of the waterfall's rock and sprays.

Its rainbow armour fitting perfectly,
It cuts the oceans like a knife,
Charting and measuring the sea
And all the million forms of life
In the vast cold waterways.
Then why can't I
Be like a salmon swimming free?
(He turns the page to a picture of a waterfall.)
A spring is born, a stream,
Welling up among grass to go
As serpents travel, swift and windingly.
The river sings its silver thanks
And joys in its mobility
To flowers and beasts along its banks
As they watch its dazzling flow.
Then why can't I
Be like a river, flowing free?
(He turns to a picture of a leopard.)
A beast is born, a leopard,
Delicate as a hyacinth.
Its shaven hide is dappled cunningly
With paintbrush marks of black and gold.
But the grown leopard shows a cruelty
That's natural, so we are told,
A monster in a labyrinth.
Then why, why, can't I
Be like a leopard running free?

Born out of rage,
Eaten with rage,
I'm a volcano. Watch me bleed.
Give me a knife—I'll show you surgery
And wrench out, raggedy and raw

Bits of my heart. Captivity!
So is there some reason or some law
Denies me the one thing I need,
Which God gave swallows and salmon too,
And beasts and leopards: to be free?

ROSAURA. What a sad story.

SIGISMUND. Who's that? I can't see.
Clotaldo, is it you?

CLARION. Go on, say it is,
But don't mention me.

ROSAURA. We are travellers
Lost in this ravine
We heard your sorrow.

SIGISMUND. So you know I'm weak?
Then you must die.

CLARION. Would you repeat that? I didn't quite hear.
I'm a little bit deaf in my right ear.

SIGISMUND. I'll tear you both in pieces.

ROSAURA. I kneel. If you are human
I know that you will spare us.
We are humble creatures.

SIGISMUND. Your voice is gentle. When I look on you
I find that I grow soft. You trouble me.
Who are you? O I know the world so little,

For I have spent my whole life in this prison,
If how I am is living. Since my birth
I have known nothing but this wilderness
Where I have lived alone, a living dead thing.
Till now I never spoke to anyone
But one old man who listens to my sorrows
And teaches me rare words and how to
 name things,
And tells me tales about the earth and sky.
But till today no one has calmed my anger,
O you have eased my eyes and charmed my
 ears,
For you refresh me and you make me wonder.

ROSAURA. I do not know how I should answer you.
I'm full of wonder too...
What shall I say? Did Heaven lead me here
To see someone unhappier than myself?
I cannot tell and yet I think it must be.
There was a wise man once who lived on
 herbs:
"Can there be anyone," he asked himself,
"More poor and sad than I?" And then he saw
Another wise man picking up the leaves
That he had thrown away. He found his
 answer.
And so have I, for I have been complaining
Of this bad world, and you have answered me.
For what I think of as unhappiness
You would call joy, as if you picked my
 leaves up.
Then if you can find comfort from my sorrows
Take them and let me tell you who I am.

(Enter CLOTALDO. He fires a shot.)

CLOTALDO. Guards! Soporific cowards!
There are intruders in the tower.

CLARION. More trouble.

SIGISMUND. That's Clotaldo. He's my jailer.

CLOTALDO. Place them under strict arrest
And cut them down if they resist.

(Enter GUARDS with masked faces.)

CLARION. I'm a completely lovable clown.
I'll be very cut up if you cut me down.

CLOTALDO. The King of Poland has decreed
This a forbidden place
And that the penalty is death
To see this monster's face.
Surrender to the guard
Of the tower by the lake
Or my pistol will tear out your throats
Like a sudden snake.

SIGISMUND. Do not harm them, master.
You'll all die if you do,
For with my nails and teeth
I will fight with you.

CLOTALDO. Sigismund, remember your own fate
When you threaten homicide,

Heaven has decreed
When you were born, you died.
Remember this prison
Is a curb upon your pride.
Lock the tower door
And take him back inside.

SIGISMUND. Yes, heavens, you are right to steal my
freedom.
If I was free I'd rise up like a giant
And pile up stones and make a staircase
mountain
And batter down the windows of the sun.

CLOTALDO. Perhaps your present sufferings are meant
To stop you doing just that. Away with him.
(*GUARDS take SIGISMUND out.*)
Surrender to the guards.

ROSAURA. Here is my sword.
I surrender it to you.
I will not yield it
Into less noble hands.

CLOTALDO. My sword's a bit bent
And blunt at the end.
It's a prize for a booby:
Here you are, friend.
(*CLARION gives the sword to a GUARD.*
CLOTALDO takes ROSAURA's. GUARD
takes CLARION out.)

ROSAURA. If I must die, sir,

Please guard it well.
It holds some great secret:
It is a legacy
From my lost father.

CLOTALDO. And who was he?

ROSAURA. I never knew him,
But I trust his sword,
And so I came to Poland,
For revenge on a man
Who has wronged my honour.

CLOTALDO (*takes his mask off. Aside*).
What is this, heavens?
I am flabbergasted.
All my own confusions,
My shame and my sorrows
Swamp my heart and mind.
Who gave it to you?

ROSAURA. My mother.

CLOTALDO. Her name?

ROSAURA. I cannot tell you that.

CLOTALDO (*aside*).
Heaven help me! Can this be
Illusion or reality?
This is the sword I gave to my sweet love
When I was living still in Muscovy.
I swore that whosoever wore that sword

Would find me kind as if he was my son.
I am bewildered. Stranger, do not think
You are alone in your misfortunes here.
You must go in but I will use you gently.
(Exit ROSAURA.)

He has her eyes, as hot as shooting stars.
Now am I like a man locked in a room
Who hears a sound in the street and runs to
the window.

My heart flies out of my eyes to stare at him.
I'm weeping. He's my son. What shall I do?
Let's work it out. One, he has offered me
My own good sword to win favour. Two,
By coming here he's brought his death day
with him.

What must I do? O heavens, what must I do?
Take him before the King? That's certain
death.

Hide him? I cannot, I should break my oath.
Now is it with me as in some old tale:
On one side, love, on one side, loyalty.
I'm torn. But why? I should not hesitate.
For loyalty to Kings is more than life
And more than honour. I believe that's true,
So do not mock me. What was it he said?
He came here to avenge some injury.
To leave an insult unavenged is shameful.
That is our code. Honour's so delicate,
A little breath, a puff of wind can smear it.
He is my son, my blood is in his veins:
What shall I do? I'll seek some middle way.
In this bad world that's best. I'll tell the King
This boy is mine. My loyalty may move him.