Wesleyan University Department of Theater presents:



WRITTEN BY
PEDRO CALDERÓN DE LA BARCA

BASED ON THE TRANSLATION BY
JO CLIFFORD

DIRECTED BY
SHIRA MILIKOWSKY

Friday, May 4, 2018 at 8 PM
Saturday, May 5, 2018 at 2 PM and 8 PM
Sunday, May 6, 2018 at 3 PM
Center for the Arts Theater

It is with sincere respect that the Theater Department acknowledges that the CFA Theater occupies the traditional indigenous homeland of the Wangunk people.

LIFE IS A DREAM is produced by special arrangement with Broadway Play Publishing Inc., New York City.

Director's Note

When Pedro Calderón de la Barca died, he left strict instructions in his will: his body should be placed in an open casket and carried through the streets of Madrid. He hoped the sight of his humbly adorned corpse would remind the people of life's truest worth – and its impermanence.

This story might be apocryphal. Still, we carried it with us through our rehearsals, like the 17th century Spanish pall bearers of our imaginations. How like a playwright: giving us instructions right up to, and well beyond, his own death.

The good you do is never lost … not even in dreams. A philosopher with a funny bone, a comedian with a dark streak, a rebellious youth who aged into a devout Roman Catholic, Calderón wrote dozens of plays, the most famous of which is *Dream.* In our journey with it over the past three months, this text has been both mirror and mirage: at times reflecting ourselves back to us with startling clarity, at times taunting us with wisdom that we felt we could almost grasp – until it slipped through our fingers, unknown; intuited, sensed, but not yet understood. Each night we dropped off to sleep (and to work, and to other classes…) then returned again, curiosity piqued, determination set, accepting, as Peter Brook once wrote, "that we can never see all of the invisible," and so we strive towards it anyway.

So it is with a 400-year-old masterpiece: together we move toward it and away from it, we puzzle through it, and ultimately we find ourselves revealed within it. Not unlike Rosaura herself, we grow our way to our own particular kind of peace. If Rosaura's wounds can be healed along her journey, Calderón tells us from beyond the grave, then we, too, might just have a chance at life.

-Shira Milikowsky, Director

Dramaturge's Note

"This life's so strange, living it is just a dream"

Existential and dramatic, *Life is a Dream* whisks audiences into the fantastical world of Pedro Calderón de la Barca's most famous comedia. A genre similar to the tragicomedy, this style of Spanish play incorporates mythology, biblical allusion, ancient history, and contemporary elements from Spain of the 1600's. Written during the height of Golden Age Spanish theater, the play offers an engaging and eerie glimpse into a crumbling empire. However, *Life is a Dream* is not an entirely dramatic work, as the piece moves swiftly between impassioned monologues and witty one-liners.

Pedro Calderón was one of the most prolific court dramatists of his era, writing over two hundred plays, forty of which have since been translated into English. *Life is a Dream*, or *La vida es sueño*, is revered as one of his best works. A master of many professions, Calderón was also a successful poet, served in the Spanish army, and eventually joined the Order of Santiago as a priest. Calderón's experiences are evident in his plays, which feature themes of religious devotion, sovereignty, honor, and revenge. Translator Jo Clifford seeks to replicate these notions in this modern version of the play, which updates the humor, highlights the contrast between actions and beliefs, and finds Rosaura and Segismundo contemplating what it means to forge connections in both dreams and reality.

In an era when many question the relevance of theatrical revivals, *Life is a Dream* proves that classical pieces can still resonate. Calderón's play is full of genuinely relatable characters, particularly in Rosaura, a woman haunted by her past. She is not only motivated by love, but by a burning desire for control and revenge. Rosaura's quest transcends the Spanish Golden Age. Her struggles are mirrored by generations of notorious women driven to extremes in pursuit of misguided romanticism, from 18th century crossdressing pirates Anne Bonny and Mary Read to Lisa Nowak, an astronaut charged with attempted murder after driving 900 miles to kill the girlfriend of her former partner. This production seeks to flesh out Rosaura's story, thrusting Calderón's 1600's play into the contemporary era. *Life is a Dream* becomes a modern tale of love, loss, and power.

-Emily Chackerian and Rodrick Edwards



Scholar's Note

Life is a Dream (written ca. 1630, published 1635) dramatizes two tightly woven stories. Segismundo, heir to the Polish throne, has been chained all his life in a tower by his father Basilio. A rationalist philosopher-king, Basilio cast Segismundo's horoscope at birth and concluded his son would become a monster, murder him, and destroy the realm. Basilio decides to test his son by placing him on the throne: if he behaves nobly and defies fate, he can claim his birthright; if he fails, Segismundo would return to prison and the crown go to his nephew and niece (Astolfo and Estrella). At court, Segismundo fails to master his murderous rage and lust. He is drugged, returned to prison, and told that his memory of life as a prince was a dream. The play opens, however, with a man descending from a mountaintop after being thrown by his steed, a hippogriff (with the hindquarters of a horse, the body of a lion, and the head, wings, and claws of an eagle). The man turns out to be a woman (Rosaura), who has come to Poland from Muscovy (Russia) to find the man who seduced and abandoned her (Astolfo). Clotaldo will prove the vital link: at once Rosaura's father (who, like Astolfo, had seduced and abandoned Rosaura's mother), Segismundo's warden, and Basilio's advisor. Much as Segismundo struggles to master his fate, Clotaldo must wrestle with his own divided loyalties (between his daughter and Astolfo, between Segismundo and his king). Basilio's subjects, learning that Poland's rightful heir has been jailed, rise up against their sovereign. In the final showdown, Segismundo must choose whether to fulfill or defy his fate, kill or forgive his father, serve himself or his kingdom. Even as the play closes, doubts linger: Can Segismundo know whether his chains or his princely title are more real? Should he put more trust in earthly or heavenly glory? Is forgiveness motivated by compassion or Machiavellian calculation? Will one tyrant be replaced by another?

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Pedro Calderón de la Barca (1600-1681) is regarded, with Lope de Vega and Tirso de Molina, as the leading playwright of the Spanish Golden Age (1500-1700). He wrote more than 80 plays, ranging from histories, comedies, tragedies, and chivalric romances to spectacular mythological and Corpus Christi plays and the first libretto for the Spanish baroque opera (*zarzuela*). Scholarship until recently, in thrall to 19th-century nationalist stereotypes, took honor and peasant dramas to be most representative of the Spanish stage. But what audiences packed theaters for, and where the Spanish drama truly excelled, was in impudently transgressive comedy and subtly elusive tragicomedy. It pioneered the wildly popular, streamlined three-act dramatic structure that became the norm much later elsewhere. Most strikingly (especially in contrast to London's commercial theaters, where boy actors played female parts), it developed a remarkable repertory of spirited, resourceful, and eloquent vehicles for star actresses.

Calderón's immediate inspiration for *Life is a Dream* was a Spanish political novel advertised as a mirror of princes, *Eustorgio and Clorilene: A Muscovite History* (1629). Like other Spanish plays of the period, its sources were cosmopolitan. The theme of a prince confined by his father at childbirth, thanks to astrological prophecy, was probably taken from a Christianized Buddhist legend (Barlaam and Josaphat), known in the Middle Ages and adapted by Lope de Vega. The central trope of life as a dream has an age-old pedigree ranging from Hinduism and the Platonic allegory of the cave to Christian asceticism and Descartes's dream argument. It was made modish by the late 16th-century revival of Menippean satire, Stoic philosophy, and classical skepticism. The political and metaphysical themes owe their urgency to intense debates, familiar to Calderón's Madrid audiences, about the legitimacy of regicide (notoriously advocated by Spanish Jesuits such as Mariana and Suárez) and the competing claims of free will (defended by Jesuits) and predestination (defended by Dominicans). The father-son conflict at its heart was a common device in comedy and a famously defining one in Sophoclean tragedy, but it may owe something of its force to Calderón's difficult relationship with a domineering father. The play's setting in Poland was not just the prudent choice of a remote

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court where terrible things can happen. It would have reminded early audiences of the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) then ravaging central Europe. Poland was a distant, yet heroic outpost of Catholicism on the menacing confessional frontier with Orthodox Russia to the east, an aggressively expansionist Lutheran Sweden to the north, and an equally threatening Ottoman empire to the south (which occupied Budapest in 1541).

Sharing in the English stage's humanist-inspired sublimity and rude, mongrelizing vitality, the Spanish drama achieved a much earlier influence because Spanish was far more dominant than English in the 17th century: in England itself (notably through Fletcher and Shirley), France (through mavericks such as Hardy and Corneille), Italy (*commedia dell'arte* troupes were drawing on the bawdy tragicomedy *La Celestina* by the 1560s), and even Holland (despite hostility between the Habsburgs and the Dutch Republic). Just as Calderón's high-flown style and apparent disregard for the classical rules earned him, like Shakespeare, the opprobrium of 18th-century neoclassical writers, for the same reasons he became the darling of early 19th-century German and English Romantics (Goethe, the Schlegels, and Shelley were ardent advocates).

Recent Spanish stagings of *Life is a Dream* have exploited, through cross-casting, the transvestite spirit of its performance tradition. Elsewhere, artists have drawn on its politics and its metaphysical hijinks to reflect on injustice in our time: The avant-garde Chilean Raúl Ruiz's 1987 eponymous film is a baroque mix of revolutionary politics and trashy movie genres. In her 2011 philosophical fiction, *The United States of Banana*, the inventive Puerto Rican writer Giannina Braschi imagines Segismundo in a 21st-century New York where his father (the King of the United States of Banana) locks him in the dungeon of the Statue of Liberty for the crime of having been born.

- Michael Armstrong-Roche
Associate Professor
Department of Romance Languages & Literatures

Cast

Segismundo ..... Capri Gehred-O'Connell
Rosaura ..... Maddie Ulevich
Clotaldo..... Adam Rahman
Basilio ..... Vianca Pérez
Astolfo..... Drew Hill
Estrella ..... Ella Larsen
Clarin..... Payton Millet
Ensemble.....Max Johnson, Phoebe Landsman,
Giacomo Marenco di Moriondo, José Luis Sánchez

Artistic Team

Director..... Shira Milikowsky
Set Designer..... Marcela Oteíza
Costume Designer.....Cybele Moon
Lighting Designer..... Calvin Anderson
Sound Designer.....Anthony Dean (’17)
Fight Choreographer.....Sean Michael Chin (’09)
Stage Manager ..... Pryor Krugman
Assistant Directors.....Emma Johnson, Shiri Benmoshe
Assistant Costume Designers.....Plearn Janvatanavit,
Alexander Olvera, Helen Wang
Assistant Set Designer ..... Tekla Monson
Assistant Lighting Designer..... Doc Polk
Assistant Sound Designer.....Olivia Backal-Balik
Dramaturges.....Emily Chackerian, Rodrick Edwards
Properties Manager.....Yichen Eva Lou

Special Thanks

Dawn Alger, Professor Michael Armstrong, Kathleen F. Conlin,
Rebecca Foster, Tekla Monson, Suzanne Sadler

Production Management Team

Technical Director & Production Manager……Rebecca Foster
CFA Master Electrician…… Suzanne Sadler
CFA Master Carpenter…… Charles Carroll
Audio Engineer ……Tony Hernández
Sound and Video Specialist……Robert Russo
Costume Shop Manager …… Christian Milik
Assistant Stage Managers ……Isabel Algrant,
Drew Weiss, Elizabeth Woolford
Run Crew…… Alex Rothenberg
Wardrobe Crew…… Josh Dobrow, Joaquina Guevara,
Thea LaCrosse, Olivia López, Khamil Riley
Light Board Operator…… Nathan Baron Silvern
Sound Board Operator…… Nick Cantin
Poster Designer …… Gabriel Drozdov
Program Editor…… Laura Pérez Maquedano
Publicity/Marketing …… Jordan Roe
Videographers…… Ames Ward, Daniel Osofsky
Photographer…… Sige Zheng

Costume Shop Staff

Celina Bernstein, Hope Fourie, Dimitri Fulconis, Emma Graham,
Erin Hussey, Dominoe Jones, Regina Melady, Sofie Somoroff

Technical Staff

Nathan Baron Silvern, Chloe Briskin, Devon Cooper, Sam Driver, Tom Fischer,
Ruby Fludzinski, Sharine Foo, Daniel Gordon, Claire Graham, Susana Hair,
Sofia Kinney, Artemio Leclerc-Jones, Laura Pérez Maquedano, Blake Pritchard,
Hayley Qin, Rose Shuker-Haines, Yuan Sun, Andy Tan, Sydney Taylor-Klaus,
Jordan Tragash, Katherine Trejo

THEA 105: Production Lab

Isabel Algrant, Hannah Berman, Nick Cantin, Yi-Chieh Cheng, Jiayao Zhu,
Alexander Carroll-Cabanes, Eli Conlin, Caitlin Cowan, Aby Crystal, Josh Dobrow,
Sam Driver, Ariel Fromm, Sarah Jin, Thea LaCrosse, Lea Moore,
Giacomo Marenco di Moriondo, Daniel Osofsky, Avery Rose Pedell, Khamil Riley,
Alex Rothenberg, Drew Weiss, Elizabeth Woolford, Adele Zhou

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Dawn Alger …… Administrative Assistant

Calvin Anderson……Visiting Assistant Professor

Katherine Brewer Ball……Visiting Assistant Professor

Rebecca Foster…….Visiting Assistant Professor, Technical Director

Quiara Alegría Hudes…Shapiro Distinguished Professor of Writing

Brian Gligor……Visiting Assistant Professor

Tony Hernández…Visiting Instructor, Assistant Technical Director

Ronald S. Jenkins…… Professor of Theater

Christian Milik…….Visiting Instructor, Costume Shop Manager

Shira Milikowsky……Visiting Assistant Professor

Cybele Elise Moon……Visiting Assistant Professor

Marcela Oteíza…… Assistant Professor

Edwin Sánchez……Visiting Artist-in-Residence

Edward Torres…… Assistant Professor of the Practice

John F. Carr…… Professor of Theater, Emeritus

William H. Francisco…… Professor of Theater, Emeritus

Gay Smith…… Professor of Theater, Emerita

Leslie A. Weinberg…… Retired Artist-in-Residence, Theater

Office Assistant

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Upcoming Events

Senior Playwriting Festival: Staged Readings

May 8. 2018 – Ring Family Performing Arts Hall, 7 PM

Bill & Stephanie

A Playwriting Thesis by David L. Caruso ’18

This written work is created in partial fulfillment for Honors in Theater.

> What place does marriage occupy in our (millennial) imagination? Is it an expectation or a need? An uninviting institution, or a signifier of adulthood? What happens to those who find people, and what happens to those who don’t? In *Bill & Stephanie,* a group of friends post-game their friends’ wedding reception, discussing matrimony, love, aloneness, monogamy, and the banal terror of adulthood until sunrise.

Lost and Found

A Playwriting Capstone by Elli Scharlin ’18

Lost and Found is a musical about a girl who loses her virginity and sets on a quest to find it We travel with our protagonist, Spencer Maude, through the mystical woods of Askaround. Along the way, we meet characters like Andy Roger, the loveable life-sized bunny, The Captain of the Seamen and the Naughty Nautical Boys, and even Buster Hymen the Gatekeeper. A coming of age story that asks the questions: what is virginity? Can it be restored? Who cares?

For more information on upcoming events, go to
http://www.wesleyan.edu/theater/productions/current_season.html