



Denver Center  
Theatre Company

# Inside Out

A STUDY GUIDE

PRODUCED BY THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

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## Life is a Dream

by Pedro Calderón de la Barca

**What's Happening, Where It's Happening and Who It's Happening To**

**S**egismundo, son of the astrologer-king Basilio of Poland, is brought up like a criminal in a country tower, guarded and tutored. Dressed only in animal skins, he is there because the horoscope cast by his father foretold nothing but disaster for himself and his country if he reigned. In his imprisonment he is discovered by Rosaura who is disguised as a young cavalier, and her servant, Bocazas.

A short time later, before crowning his nephew Astolfo and niece Estrella as king and queen of the country, King Basilio decides to test the character of his legitimate heir. Segismundo is drugged and transferred to the palace, where he wakes up to find himself regarded as the prince by all around him. Having been raised like a caged beast, the prince rules as cruelly as the stars predicted. He reviles his father, insults Astolfo, tries to ravish Rosaura, attempts to kill his tutor and throws a troublesome servant from a balcony. Convinced of the truth of his prophecy, Basilio imprisons his son again.

When the Poles learn that their lawful prince will not reign over them, they force the soldier-guards to release Segismundo, who leads the rebels against his father. As victor, he can claim the spoils and avenge his past. But will he do so? In this play of heroism and honor, a young man enters the worlds of illusion and reality to see if he can realize his fate. ■



PHOTO BY GARY ISAACS

# The Golden Age of Spain

“—Spain, which was reckoned poor, is become the richest of countries.”

—Christopher Columbus,  
letter to Dona Juana de Torres, October 1500.

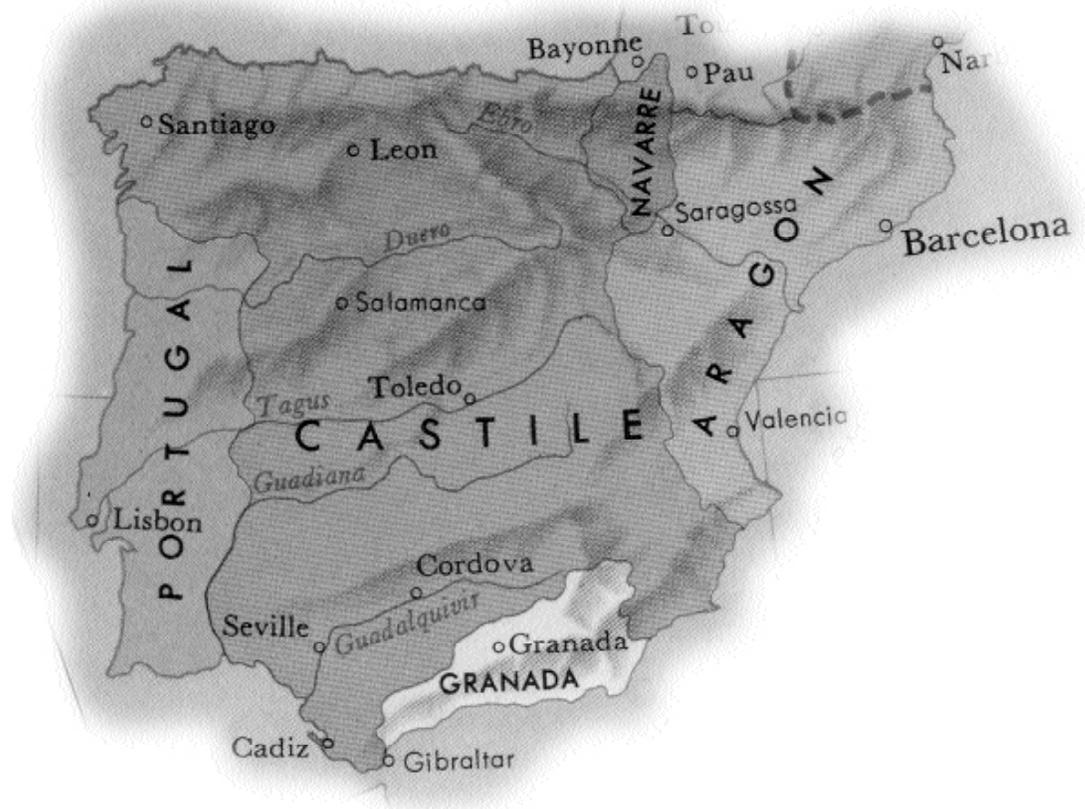
At the time of Calderón’s birth, Philip III, a third Hapsburg monarch (Austrian royalty), sat on the throne of Spain. Under his predecessor, Philip II, Spain had reached the height of its brief but mighty power—and this had occurred within a century from its birth as a nation. The two states of Castile and Aragon were united following the marriage of Ferdinand and Isabella in 1469; with this union, Spain became a nation. The fledgling country became more powerful in 1492 when Abdullah, the last Moorish king, returned to Africa after Granada was conquered. That same year, Columbus founded Haiti, the first Spanish colony in the Americas. Through the marriage of Philip II (Archduke of Austria) to Juana of Castile, the Netherlands became Spanish provinces in 1506. Spain claimed the Philippines in 1521 and in 1559, the perpetual wars between France and Spain ended in victory for Spain. In 1571, Don Juan de Austria, half-brother of Philip II, destroyed the Turkish fleet near Lepanto, thus assuring Spain’s dominance in the Mediterranean. Finally, in 1580, as a result of the death of its

own royalty, Portugal fell to Spain by default.

But the glory was short-lived. In 1581, the Netherlands seceded and the decline of Spanish power began. Seven years later, the Spanish Armada was defeated off the coast of England. Despite the rich sources of treasure from Cortes’ and Pizarro’s expeditions in the Americas, the defense of Spain exhausted the resources of her peasants and her colonies, and the country was too impoverished to recover.

The common people, long accustomed to war and misery, looked upon their own wretchedness as a matter of divinely ordained fate; liberation would only come as promised by the Catholic church and thus they defended their religion passionately. In such a climate, the clergy established powers that culminated in the absolutism and terror of the Inquisition, which was not finally curbed until the 19th century.

At court, Spanish aristocrats were not as wealthy as their



counterparts in France. Centuries of guerrilla warfare with the Moors prevented these nobles from obtaining material goods. Honor and religion were their focal points. Work was considered to be undignified, and the concept and code of honor shifted from a knightly ideal to an aristocratic practice that caused much bloodshed.

The peasant class, besides being the poorest and most wretched, was the victim of these aristocratic knights. This combination of tradesmen, craftsmen, journeymen and conjurers was constantly robbed and over-taxed; many became thieves who were known to corrupt officials and employed as paid accomplices. While most of 17th-century Europe was witnessing the rise of the middle class, Spain knew only the very rich and

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# THE PLAYWRIGHT

**P**edro Calderón de la Barca was born in Madrid on January 17, 1600, the middle child among five brothers and sisters to an aristocratic Castilian family. His father was a court official and his mother was a noblewoman of German descent.

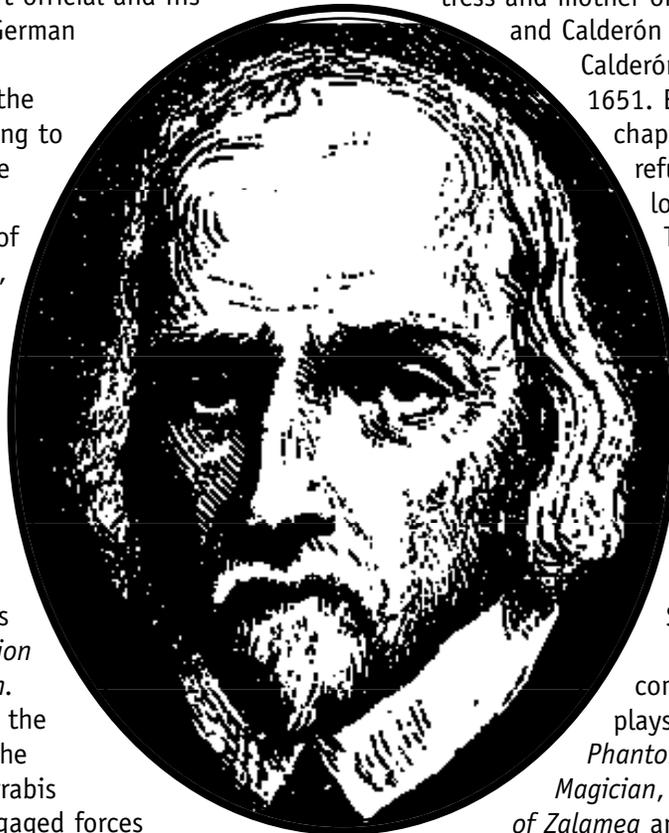
In 1615, Calderón attended the Jesuit school in Madrid intending to become a priest, but instead he studied law, mathematics and philosophy at the universities of Alcala and Salamanca. In 1622, he won a poetry contest and was praised by Lope de Vega, the great Spanish playwright. After military service in Castile, he was appointed court poet and director of the court theatre by King Philip IV. In 1635, he also became the director of the court theatre at Buen Retiro. During this time he wrote the plays, *Devotion to the Cross* and *Life is a Dream*.

Calderón became a knight of the Order of Santiago and in 1638 he fought in the Battle of Fuenterrabis against the French. He also engaged forces against the rebellious Catalans, but since Philip IV wished to keep him at court, he remained long enough to complete his play, *The Battle Between Love and Jealousy*. However, in the honorable Spanish tradition, he returned to the front the same year.

Calderón was wounded in battle in 1642 and could no longer fight. He took leave of military service and returned to Madrid. Several years later his presumed mistress and mother of his only son, Pedro José, died and Calderón also became seriously ill.

Calderón finally became a priest in 1651. Because he did not get the chaplaincy at Toledo he wanted, he refused to write for the theatre any longer, a threat he later recanted. Two years later, he became the chaplain of the Capilla de Reyes Nuevos in Toledo and directed plays in Madrid. Between 1664 and 1677, five volumes of his works were published, including 12 "autos sacramentales," plays celebrating specific religious events. He died in May, 1681 while writing a play and was buried in the Church of the Savior in Madrid.

Calderón wrote more than 200 comedies, dramas and festival plays. Some of the titles include: *The Phantom Lady*, *The Wonder-Working Magician*, *The Constant Prince*, *The Mayor of Zalamea* and *Jealousy, the Greatest Monster*. Productions of his works declined in the 19th century, but the mid-20th-century writers, led by Albert Camus and Giorgio Strehler, have encouraged revivals of his plays because of their "cosmic world image." ■



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the very poor.

**T**he most distinct difference between Spain and its neighboring countries was its spiritual and intellectual life. The profound transformation of European culture, which the Renaissance had triggered, did not touch Spain, at least, not religiously. While the church became less important and materialism more important in other people's lives, Spain remained Catholic in a medieval sense, retaining the belief in the beatific church, one that guaranteed order both in this world and in the next.

As Spain declined economically and politically, it flourished in literature and art because of court patronage. Literature reflected a Baroque spirit, which to some is an expression of courtly life, to others a secularization of life and society. Drama dominated because the court provided a large audience. Playwrights like Lope de Vega, Tirso de Molina, Juan Ruiz de Alarcón and Calderón wrote "cloak-and-dagger" plays, social dramas and autos sacramentales. Probably the most important writer of this era was Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, whose *Don Quixote* remains a classic novel to this day.

Sculpture and painting also flourished.

In Seville, Martínez Montañés produced works that distinguished him as the greatest Spanish sculptor of that time, while Alonso Cano and Pedro de Mena worked in Granada. Spanish painting was elevated to a position of supremacy by the work of El Greco (Domenico Theotocopoulos, formerly of Greece). His unique elongated figures produced an unearthly quality that transcended reality; he belonged to no school and he left no following. Diego Velázquez (1599-1660), the favorite painter of Philip IV, is renowned for mythological subjects like *Bacchus* and *Vulcan's Forge*. While Valdes Leal painted the violent and gloomy with dramatic intensity,

# The influence of **ASTROLOGY** in the 16th and 17th centuries



**I**n the play, Basilio casts a horoscope for Segismundo, his son, that foretells disaster. He banishes the boy to a tower to thwart the predictions. His science is coincident with Renaissance concepts of the scientific method. As the Renaissance radiated throughout western Europe, astrology in all its aspects became recognized and accepted as a valid field of study by the Catholic church.

Monarchs and popes had their favorite astrologers. For example, Franciscus Priulus, the pet astrologer of Leo X (1513), predicted daily occurrences that Leo found amazingly accurate. Paul III (1534), head of the Church during the Counter-Reformation, relied upon the words of Luca Guarico, who had foretold his ascent to the papacy. He also selected the “appropriate” time for the laying of the cornerstone of a new building in St. Peter’s church complex.

One of the most renowned names in astrological annals is Nostradamus. Whether a genius or a charlatan, he was endowed with extraordinary talents. In 1555, he published the first edition of his *Centuries*, a collection of quatrains that were full of anagrams, puns and obscure references. Though vague and equivocal, the work interested the French court because it warned that the King might be blinded or slain in a duel. Sure enough, in 1559, King Henri, jousting with his guard, was pierced in the eye and died. Thus, the French took seriously the quatrain supposedly describing the bloody fallout of the French Revolution, more than 200 years in the future.

**W**hile the French embraced Nostradamus, Princess Elizabeth of England took an interest in a mathematician named John Dee. When Elizabeth was being held in confinement near Oxford while her elder half-sister Mary occupied the British throne, Dee predicted that Elizabeth would rise to a high place in the kingdom and would live to a satisfyingly old age. When Elizabeth inherited

**“There is in man a double spring of action, namely nature and the will; and nature for its part is ruled by the stars, while the will is free; but unless it resists is swept along by nature and becomes mechanical.”**

—Albertus Magnus of Cologne.<sup>3</sup>

the crown, she summoned Dee to select the day of her coronation. He settled on Sunday, January 15, 1558 and thereafter was consulted by the queen on matters ranging from affairs of state to cures for toothaches. His successful predictions included the execution of her rival Mary, Queen of Scots and the defeat of the Spanish Armada.

With the invention of movable type, ordinary citizens gained access to astrological predictions. In 1469, the first almanac (a word that is derived from the Arabic “al-manakh” or calendar) was produced. By the 16th century, almanacs were read as widely as newspapers in succeeding generations.

As the 16th century turned into the 17th, citizens of the western world found their affairs were touched by the science of the stars. Their monarchs and prelates were advised and consulted by astrologers on matters great and small; their marches to war were set according to heavenly clocks; their ailments

**“It is the stars,  
the stars  
above us,  
govern  
our  
conditions.”**

—William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, IV, iii, 34.

were cured or not by physicians who looked to horoscopic tables instead of fever charts; and their rising, bathing,

# COMMENTARY

## ON THE THEMES OF THE PLAY

**WITCH:** Rapunzel! What are you doing here? What's the matter?

**RAPUNZEL:** Oh, nothing! You just locked me in a tower without company for fourteen years, then blinded my Prince and banished me to a desert—. Because of the way you treated me, I'll never, never be happy!

**WITCH:** I was just trying to be a good mother.

—Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine,  
*Into the Woods*, p. 95.

**T**he themes of *Life is a Dream*, written in 1634, are timeless and range from the relationship of parent to child to mysticism and reality. One theme is the conflict of empirical knowledge and moral law. Basilio is hailed as a learned king but is not prudent, just or a loving father. He misapplies his learning to the tasks of government and places confidence in the inexact science of astrology. Though he pursues knowledge, his point of view is too distanced and intellectual to be applicable to society and the raising of his son. When Basilio imprisons Segismundo, he fails to recognize that isolation and imprisonment will not correct his son's violent inclinations. It does not occur to him that understanding and education might be more beneficial. So, when we first see Segismundo, he is dressed in fur pelts. This is a basic symbol used in Calderón's work. "The pelts suggest the man wearing them has not found himself, and therefore, still an animal, he lives in the wilderness from which there is no escape."<sup>4</sup> If Segismundo is lost, it is because his father has made him so.

Another theme for Calderón is "doing the right thing"; it is the moral imperative that leads mankind out of chaos. For the noble Spaniard of the 16th-17th century, it is the concept of "la honra" or honor. "Honor means the repute which has been earned by his rank, by his noble deeds, and by the worthiness which is manifest in him."<sup>5</sup> However, there is more honor in gaining a victory over oneself, in knowing how to be master of one's fate, whether good or bad. This is the lesson Segismundo learns when, after his beastly behavior at court, he wakes

up to find himself imprisoned again. When the rebels court him as their leader, he knows he must act now with more deliberation and caution. The code of honor is also demonstrated when Segismundo confronts his father after defeating his army in battle. In the original script, when the vanquished king attempts to kneel before his son, the son raises him up and then kneels before his father. Segismundo has decided to do what is right and as a Christian, to do right means to forgive as well as to recognize the existing order.

**T**he fundamental ideas of the play, doubt in the nature of reality and truth in illusion, are of Asian/Indian origin. In Buddha's early life, he sat under the Bo tree and contemplated life in a meditative, dreamlike state. It is also of interest that the motif of a man who awakens in a strange environment is of Eastern origin. That Segismundo acquires insight and knowledge through dreams is not unusual in this century when "psychoanalysts tell us that what goes on in our unconscious minds is more real in our sense of the world than the reality experienced by our conscious minds."<sup>6</sup> Segismundo, in reality and/or dreams, recognizes his powerlessness and is now ready to think. To think in this sense is to reflect upon the meaning of life and to speculate on the nature of reality. Thus, he learns self-understanding in order to understand the world, self-control in order to lead the country. When he does achieve power, he is honorable and magnanimous and certainly not dominating. Self-reflection has given him assurance and a clarity to his vision. He finds a moral law within himself and acting out of his free will, decides in favor of goodness. "It is a crucial moment when Segismundo faces up to temporal illusion; but his awareness of illusion enables him to savor the world. ... Illusion must regulate itself, find its proper equilibrium against the world of reality."<sup>7</sup> ■

**"All that we see or seem  
Is but a dream  
within a dream."**

Edgar Allan Poe, *A Dream Within a Dream*.

# Activities

## Language:

There was a tremendous richness of language during the Renaissance. New words were coined and borrowed from other languages at a great rate. Some we still use. Others have either changed their meaning drastically or become archaic. As for spelling, although a dictionary was published in 1604, there was no real standard, which resulted in considerable creativity. For example, some words that found their way into the English language were:

from Spanish: armada, cargo

from Italian: madrigal, miniature, trio

from High German: carouse

from Low German: luck, frolic, rant,

from French: fiancé, rendezvous, hors d'oeuvre

from Arabic: almanac, alcohol, cipher, elixir

from Romany: pal

As a class, try and add to this list. Try words used in music, cooking, art, sports, medicine, etc.

## Travel:

During Cervantes' lifetime, however long a journey took, it combined land and water routes.

Using a map describe the best route for Segismundo to get from Madrid, Spain to England, to the Netherlands, to Italy, to France, to Austria and to Egypt. Use both land and water routes and tell how he is to get across the mountains.

## Research: Every Day Life

Make lists of the following:

1. What foods were available in the 1600s? Was chocolate available? Coffee? Tea? What was used for a sweetener? What would meals be like? How were they prepared? How was food preserved since there was no refrigeration?

2. What sewing materials were available—silk, brocade, satin, cotton and wool? What were clothes like? How many changes of clothing did people have? Were shoes worn by everyone? We live in a throw-away society now, but centuries ago people repaired shoes and clothes over and over again and passed them

down until they were completely worn out.

3. How were people employed and trained—farmers, domestic servants, laborers, merchants, craftsmen?

4. How were people educated? What percentage of the general public could read and write?

5. When was the first printing press invented and did it change the life of people?

6. What did people do for entertainment—fairs, tournaments, plays, wandering minstrels, festivals?

7. What were housing and churches like?

8. What were prison conditions like?

9. What was invented during this time?

What past inventions improved the lives of the people?

10. What superstitions did people commonly believe?

11. What was general medicine like? What was the life expectancy of men, women, children and babies?

12. How were children treated by their parents? When did children enter the workforce?

13. What were the rights of the common man, woman and child? Were they protected by the law?

## The Appeal:

Teams of three or more students

Players are divided into three parts of a triangle.

a. Supplicant (who pleads for some thing)

b. Accuser (who makes a charge)

c. Judiciary (who makes the choice and determines whether supplicant is successful)

Either individuals or teams can play each corner of the triangle.

Each of the three parts has a different focus, i.e., pleading, accusing, determining success of supplication or accusation.

## Example cases for *Life is a Dream*:

Accuser: Segismundo

Supplicant: the Bascilio

Argument: Segismundo's imprisonment

Accuser: Basilio

Supplicant: Segismundo

Argument: Petitioning for his freedom/in spite of his horoscope

Accuser: Rosaura

Supplicant: Segismundo

Argument: Segismundo's treatment of Rosaura

Accuser: Clotaldo or servant

Supplicant: Segismundo

Argument: Segismundo's violence toward them

The Supplicant and Accuser should play to the Judiciary, work with the student audience and the mob to gain sympathy and support.

## Discussion:

1. Discuss bias in society. In Segismundo's case, the stars are against him and condemn him to imprisonment, but what if his horoscope is wrong or astrology a false science? Do we have societal biases today?

2. Imprisonment prevented Segismundo from participating in society and his legitimate place in the royal government. How do we prevent those we perceive as different from participating in our society, schools, communities and government?

3. Do people still believe in astrology? Do we still rely on the supernatural?

## How would you feel or behave if you were:

Segismundo? He has been locked away for many years by his own parent.

Rosaura? She has been attacked by Segismundo.

Basilio? He believed he did the right thing, but his people have released his son.

Segismundo? He has just been released from jail and sent to court with no explanation.

## Life has changed somewhat since the 1600s. Today:

What would Rosaura be like and what would she do about Segismundo's behavior?

What would happen to Basilio if he locked his son away? What would his rights be?

What would Segismundo do if he were threatened by his parent? What would his rights be? ■

# Notes

1. Edwards, p. xxiii.
2. Cascardi, p. 12.
3. Foreman, p. 59.
4. Gerstinger, p. 81.
5. Defourneaux, p. 32.
6. Gerstinger, p. 89.
7. Cascardi, p. 17.

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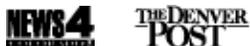
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