Life Is a Dream Study Guide

Life Is a Dream by Pedro Calderón de la Barca

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

In the original Spanish, *Life Is a Dream* is a verse play. In translations attempting to be true to the original verse form, the qualities that add to the play's appeal□its lyricism, poetic invention, and linguistic beauty□can make the play seem stilted and more difficult and less engaging than it is. Edward and Elizabeth Huberman, in 1963, fashioned a prose translation of *La vida es sueño* that, while it does not sacrifice the beauty, wit, drama, imagery, or philosophical playfulness of the original, flows with ease and is natural and engaging. It is available in *Spanish Drama*, edited by Angel Flores and published by Bantam Books.

Author Biography

Nationality 1: Spanish

Birthdate: 1600

Deathdate: 1681

Pedro Calderón de la Barca was born in Madrid on January 17, 1600. His mother died when he was ten. His father, secretary of the king's treasury, died five years later. Calderón was educated at the Jesuit College in Madrid, where he prepared to take holy orders. But before his studies were completed, he enrolled in the university at Salamanca to study law. He neglected his law studies there, however, and wrote poetry instead. Between 1620 and 1622, in Madrid, Calderón participated in a literary festival held to celebrate the beatification and canonization of Saint Isidore, Madrid's patron saint, and was honored in the literary competitions that were a part of the celebration. In 1622, he became Spain's court poet.

There are conflicting accounts of how Calderón spent his next years. According to Juan de Vera Tassis y Villaroel, Calderón's contemporary, editor, literary executor, and biographer, Calderón served in Italy and Flanders in the Spanish army between 1625 and 1635. There are many extant legal documents, however, that suggest that Calderón was living in Madrid during these years. One document indicates that, in 1629, Calderón and a group of his friends broke into the convent of the Trinitarian nuns to seize an actor who had stabbed Calderón's brother Diego and had fled there for sanctuary. In a sermon preached before Philip IV, Hortensio Felix Paravincio denounced Calderón for this act. Calderón reciprocated by mocking the priest's linguistic pomposity and bombast in his play *El principe constatae* (*The Constant Prince*) and was jailed for a short time.

His imprisonment did not harm his reputation. In 1635, after the death of the great Spanish playwright and man of letters Lope de Vega, Calderón became known as Spain's greatest living playwright. In 1636, a volume of Calderón's plays, edited by another of his brothers, José, was published. *La vida es sueño* (*Life Is a Dream*) appeared in that collection. That same year (1636), Philip IV commissioned a series of plays by Calderón to be performed at the royal theater located inside the Buen Retiro, which was Philip's private park. In 1637, Philip made Calderón a knight of the Order of Santiago.

In 1640, despite recognition and popularity as a playwright, Calderón interrupted his career and became a horseman in an army raised by Philip's prime minister, Gaspar de Guzmán Olivares, to quell a secessionist rebellion in Catalonia. Because of ill health, he retired from the army at the end of 1642. In 1645, he was awarded a military pension in recognition of his valor in battle.

Calderón did not marry, but he had a mistress, with whom he had a son, Pedro José. The death of his mistress around 1648 or 1649 left him distraught, and he sought

consolation in renewed religious devotion. In 1650, he became a tertiary of the Order of Saint Francis and was ordained a priest in 1651. At the time, he renounced writing for the theater.

Although Calderón continued in the priesthood until the end of his life, he began again to write plays after 1653. Most of them are *autos sacramentales*, religious allegories performed on and in celebration of Christian holy days. Some of these plays offended the Inquisition□the judicial branch of the Roman Catholic Church concerned with protecting the approved understanding of Catholic Church doctrine□and were condemned and the manuscripts confiscated. Nevertheless, Calderón was appointed honorary chaplain to Philip IV in 1663, and the condemnation of the plays was lifted in 1671. Calderón wrote his last secular play at the age of eighty-one, in honor of Charles II's marriage to Marie-Louise de Bourbon.

Calderón died on May 25, 1681, in Madrid. His executor, Vera Tassis, published an edition of his complete works between 1682 and 1691, ensuring Calderón's place in Spanish literature.

Plot Summary

Act 1, Scene 1

A figure dressed as a man enters. When the man speaks, the audience realizes that it is a woman. Transported from her home in Muscovy by a flying horse, Rosaura has been set down in the mountains of Poland, accompanied by the talkative Clarin. Without naming the cause of her grief, Rosaura complains of her unhappiness. She and Clarin stumble upon a tower and hear within the rattle of chains and then a human voice. It is Segismundo, clothed in animal skins, lamenting his wretched state.

Enraged that he has been overheard in his moment of weakness, Segismundo threatens to kill Rosaura and Clarin. Rosaura begs him for mercy. Her voice enchants him; he cannot take his eyes off her. Not knowing that she is a woman, he is, nevertheless, fascinated by her. Wretched as she thought she was, seeing Segismundo makes Rosaura realize how much worse it is for him. She asks if there is anything she can do to help him, but the jailer Clotaldo and the guards rush in and seize her and Clarin.

Segismundo struggles vainly to free himself from his chains in order to save them from the death that is the punishment for anyone who sees him. Rosaura and Clarin are blindfolded and their weapons confiscated. Rosaura tells Clotaldo to guard her sword, since it is a key to great mysteries, though she does not know what they are. She was given the sword by a woman and instructed to go to Poland to revenge an injury done to her (Rosaura). An unidentified person in Poland, she was told, would recognize the sword and protect her. Clotaldo recognizes the sword. He had given it to Violante, Rosaura's mother, whom he had seduced but not married. Violante gave the sword to Rosaura, and it signifies to Clotaldo that Rosaura is his child□his son, he thinks.

Resolving the conflict between love for his □son□ and duty to his king, Clotaldo decides to take his prisoners to the king and perhaps win pardon for his □son□; if the pardon is granted, Clotaldo might then be able to help his □son□ avenge the wrong done him. But Clotaldo does not reveal himself to Rosaura. Should his effort fail, his □son□ will die□not knowing that it will be through the agency of his own father.

Act 1, Scene 2

Cousins contending for the throne of Poland, Astolfo, with his soldiers, and Estrella, with her ladies, confront each other. Rather than battle, Astolfo proposes that they join together in love and jointly rule Poland. Estrella is wary of his declaration of love, because he wears the portrait of another woman on a chain around his neck. Their exchange is cut short by the entrance of Basilio, king of Poland, and his entourage.

Addressing the court, Basilio explains his plan for the succession, revealing a history that had been unknown to the court and which solves some of the mysteries of the first

scene. Learned in mathematics, Basilio cast the horoscope of his son, Segismundo, while the child was still in his mother's womb. In it, Basilio saw that Segismundo would overthrow him and become a tyrannical ruler. To defeat destiny, Basilio declared that Segismundo died at birth, along with his mother, and then secretly locked the infant in a tower. He made Clotaldo his tutor and jailer and decreed death to anyone who entered the tower and discovered the secret.

Before he surrenders his crown to Astolfo and Estrella, however, Basilio informs the court that he has planned an experiment to see whether Segismundo can overcome his destiny. Segismundo will be drugged, brought from prison to the court, attired and treated like a prince, and told his true history and the reason for his imprisonment. Basilio hopes that armed with this warning, Segismundo will become a good ruler. If he shows himself to be virtuous, he will be made king. Astolfo and Estrella agree to renounce their claims in that case. Should Segismundo show himself to be cruel and tyrannical, however, he will be drugged again, returned to the tower prison, and told that his experience at the court was merely a dream. Astolfo and Estrella will rule Poland.

After the court withdraws and Basilio is left alone, Clotaldo enters with Rosaura and Clarin. Because Basilio has revealed the story of Segismundo, Rosaura will not be punished for having seen him. There is still, however, her dishonor to avenge. Clotaldo returns her sword, and she tells him that Astolfo is the enemy she seeks. Clotaldo again is burdened by divided loyalties. Astolfo is his lord. He tells Rosaura that since Astolfo is the duke of Muscovy and Rosaura is his subject, Astolfo cannot have dishonored □him□ (Rosaura) no matter what he did. Rosaura is then compelled to reveal that she is a woman and that the dishonor was rape.

Act 2, Scene 1

Astonished by his transformation, Segismundo appears at court, dressed like a prince. Clotaldo tells him who he is and of the dire prophecy about him, hoping that the warning will correct him. Segismundo, however, responds in rage, threatening to kill Clotaldo. Clotaldo exits; Astolfo enters and salutes Segismundo, who returns his greeting with insults. Estrella enters. Segismundo is captivated by her beauty and is rudely forward with her. When a servant points out the faults in his behavior, Segismundo grabs the man and throws him off a balcony. When Basilio learns that Segismundo has acted according to his unhappy expectations, despite warning, he is grieved. Segismundo responds to his reprimands with contempt, and Basilio leaves him angrily, advising him that although he appears to be enjoying a position of power, he ought to take heed□he may only be dreaming.

Segismundo does not heed him, however. When Rosaura, now dressed as a woman and following in Estrella's train, encounters him again, he demands she surrender to him. She tries to leave; he orders the doors shut. As Segismundo is about to force Rosaura to yield to him, Clotaldo attempts to save her. Segismundo draws his dagger, and Clotaldo seizes it. They struggle. Rosaura exits, crying for help; Astolfo runs in and comes between Segismundo and Clotaldo. Astolfo demands that Segismundo return his

dagger to its sheath, but Segismundo refuses. Astolfo draws his sword, and the two duel. Basilio enters, and, following the code of chivalry, they both sheath their swords in front of the king. Basilio demands an explanation. Segismundo boasts that he has tried to kill Clotaldo and that he may be moved to kill Basilio himself in revenge for having been imprisoned. So saying, he leaves the stage. The king orders that Segismundo be returned to his prison and made to believe that all that has occurred was only a dream.

Alone with Estrella, Astolfo declares his love, but she scoffs at him and demands that he speak of love not to her but to the woman whose portrait he has been wearing. He promises to replace that portrait with Estrella's and goes to bring her Rosaura's portrait. Estrella then catches sight of Rosaura, who has entered during their conversation. Unaware that Astolfo's portrait is of Rosaura, she asks Rosaura to take it from Astolfo when he returns, because it would embarrass Estrella to do so herself.

When Astolfo returns with the portrait, expecting to find Estrella, he is shocked to find Rosaura instead. She says that she is not Rosaura but Astrea, Estrella's serving woman. He insists that she is Rosaura; denying it again, she explains that Estrella has asked her to take the portrait from him. He refuses to give it to her; she attempts to seize it, and they struggle. Estrella enters, astonished at the sight of them. Rosaura explains that as she waited for Astolfo, she remembered that she had a picture of herself and took it out to look at. Astolfo, upon seeing her, took the picture from her. Estrella sees the picture of Rosaura and gives it to her, believing the story that it is hers. Rosaura leaves, and Estrella demands the □other□ portrait from Astolfo. There being no other portrait, he has none to give and cannot admit that the portrait of Rosaura was the one in his possession, for that would be admitting that he had dishonored her. Disgusted by him, Estrella says that she wants neither the portrait nor ever to see him again. She leaves, and he trails after, begging her to let him explain.

Act 2, Scene 2

Drugged, Segismundo is returned to his prison, accompanied by Clotaldo, his tutor/jailer, and by Clarin, who is imprisoned because he talks too much. Segismundo wakes, as astonished to be back in prison as he was to be a prince. Clotaldo explains he has been dreaming, but Segismundo has trouble believing it. Since his experience at court seemed so real, perhaps he might have been awake then and be dreaming now, he thinks. When Clotaldo questions him about his life at court, Segismundo recalls its glories and his own violent behavior, including his attempts to kill Clotaldo. Clotaldo reminds Segismundo that he has cared for him as his tutor and advises him that even in dreams one ought to do good. Left alone, Segismundo realizes that what Clotaldo has said is true and promises himself to restrain his fierceness and fury because□since he can never be sure when he is dreaming and when he is not□perhaps everything is a dream and life is an illusion in which we are not what we are but only what we dream we are.

Act 3, Scene 1

Clarin's reverie about what life is like in prison is interrupted by a mob, shouting that they have come to free Segismundo. They do not want to be ruled by Astolfo, a foreigner. They mistake Clarin for Segismundo, however. Segismundo enters, declares himself, and finds that he is at the head of a force that will fight to make him king. He is reluctant to believe that what is happening is real, remembering that the last time he was endowed with kingship, it was a dream. He maintains that the people freeing him are only shadows. The mob persists. A soldier argues that dreams are omens and that Segismundo's earlier dream was an omen of the reality that now appears to him. Segismundo accepts the role they impose on him, even if it is illusory; he is prepared to be disillusioned.

That Segismundo's realization that everything is illusory has tempered his spirit is clear when Clotaldo enters. He expects to be murdered and throws himself at Segismundo's feet, ready to die. Segismundo tells him to rise. He acknowledges that Clotaldo has been his teacher; that he needs Clotaldo's guidance; and that even if he is dreaming, he wishes to do good deeds. Clotaldo explains that he cannot side with him against Basilio. Segismundo flies into a momentary rage but catches himself, particularly because he is not even sure he is awake. He praises Clotaldo's courage and allows him to go to the king. Whether he is awake or asleep, Segismundo says, does not matter. All that matters is to act well and do good deeds.

Act 3, Scene 2

There is tumult and bloodshed as the people battle, some supporting Segismundo and others Astolfo. Basilio himself rides into battle to defend his crown against Segismundo. Rosaura complains to Clotaldo that although Astolfo has seen her, he still woos Estrella. She wants Clotaldo to kill Astolfo. Clotaldo explains that because Astolfo saved his life when Segismundo tried to kill him, he is in Astolfo's debt; to kill him would show an unbecoming lack of gratitude. He says that, instead, he will give Rosaura his fortune but that she must enter a convent. Rosaura refuses and declares that she will kill Astolfo herself to avenge her honor. At that point, Clotaldo agrees to help her.

Act 3, Scene 3

Leading his troops, Segismundo declares that the less he cares for victory, the less it will grieve him when he wakes to find his triumph has been only in a dream. Armed, Rosaura implores his assistance in her cause against Astolfo, recounting the story of her mother's seduction and betrayal by a man whose identity she does not know (but whom the audience knows is Clotaldo) and of her own similar seduction and betrayal by Astolfo. She speaks of the other times that she and Segismundo have seen each other□in the tower, where he was imprisoned, and at court, where he had princely power. That she has known him in both these states adds to his confusion about which was a dream and which a waking state, or if both are the same.

Whether waking or dreaming, Segismundo understands that Rosaura is in his power and that he may satisfy his lust. This momentary urge is overcome by his reflection that if he is dreaming, abandoning the way of goodness will gain him little lasting pleasure. If he is not dreaming and really awake, the case is similar, for life is like a dream from which one wakes in death, and there is little satisfaction gained from an evil action, which is as short-lived as an action in a dream and will have eternal consequences. Segismundo therefore steels himself against his lust for Rosaura and proceeds to do battle against Astolfo.

Clarin, though he is hiding, is killed in the crossfire of battle. Segismundo's forces are victorious. Basilio, urged to flee by Astolfo and Clotaldo, does not. He is resigned to the death he expects at the hands of Segismundo. But Segismundo lets his father live, renounces his own passion for Rosaura, and gives her to Astolfo to marry, thereby restoring her honor. He takes Estrella as his wife and becomes the king, virtuous and merciful, because he is aware that life is a dream and dreams are illusions that end.

Act 1, First Scene (p. 293-303)

Act 1, First Scene (p. 293-303) Summary

The young, jilted Rosaura pursues her former lover, Astolfo, the Duke of Muscovy, to Poland in an attempt to retrieve a locket bearing her likeness. Astolfo has traveled to Poland to claim the throne and marry his cousin, the royal Estrella. Meanwhile the aged Basilio, king of Poland, reconsiders his decision which forbids his own son Segismundo from inheriting the throne. Confirmed in his decision by Segismundo's brutal behavior, Basilio announces the wedding of Astolfo and Estrella, and names Astolfo as his heir. Meanwhile the reformed Segismundo gathers an army and marches on the royal palace. Basilio and Segismundo meet on the field of battle and Segismundo is victorious. Basilio is spared dishonor, however, as Segismundo announces his reformation and wisely declares peace to the nation.

The first scene of Act 1 transpires amidst Polish mountain crags, which partially obscure a nondescript tower. Rosaura, accompanied by a servant named Clarnn, has traveled from Muscovy to Poland in an attempt to secure redress to a grave offense of honor. She has dressed like a man both for safety and to enable her quest. Rosaura is thrown by her wild-spirited horse and tumbles down a craggy escarpment. She comes to rest lamenting her accident and is shortly joined by Clarnn. They wonder aloud how they shall proceed when they hear moaning and calling from nearby. They scout about and discover a prison tower hidden within massive rocks. Entering the tower, they first hear, and then catch sight of, Segismundo. He is laden with chains and dressed in animal skins and, between moans, laments his wretched fate.

When Segismundo realizes he is being overheard, he yells out in fury, threatening to murder any who comes within his grasp. Rosaura emerges, throws herself upon his mercy and begs for clemency. Segismundo is charmed by her soft features. He explains that his entire life has been passed in chains within a cell, and that he has only ever seen the face of one other human being—his tutor, Clotaldo. Even the prison guards wear masks to obscure their visages. Rosaura is moved to pity and astonishment and finds that her own crushing problems now seem less significant.

Their conversation is interrupted when Clotaldo and the guards, all wearing masks, discover the prison has been compromised. Armed, they rush in, force Segismundo aside and take Rosaura and Clarnn prisoner. As the guards remove their weapons, Clotaldo takes a particular interest in Rosaura's sword and demands to know how she obtained it, but she refuses to supply the information. In an aside, Clotaldo explains that his sword is a token and that Rosaura's sword is in fact his own sword, left with a long-ago sexual partner named Violante. Clotaldo had left it with Voilante should Violante birth a son. The son would bring the sword to Clotaldo as a token of identity and thus claim kinship with the nobleman Clotaldo. He is now vexed because he must arrest for trespass Rosaura, who, dressed as a man, Clotaldo mistakes for his son. Rosaura explains that she bears the sword to Poland to seek redress for an egregious insult to

her honor. Clotaldo agonizes over his decision but ultimately decides he must serve his king over his personal feelings. Not revealing further information to Rosaura, Clotaldo claps on the chains and hauls Rosaura and Clarnn before the king, accusing them of criminal trespass—a capital offense.

Act 1, First Scene (p. 293-303) Analysis

Much of the dramatic tension within the play is created by limited release of factual knowledge and the subtle interplay of "who knows what" at any given moment of the drama. The initial scene reveals that Segismundo has been raised from birth as a sequestered child, his only companion being the aging Clotaldo, who has acted as tutor in all things. The tower prison has been set aside by strict, legal decree and it is forbidden, upon pain of death, even to approach the tower. Thus Rosaura and Clarnn, by stumbling upon the tower unwittingly, have committed a capital offense. Clotaldo, ever the loyal subject, arrests the two intruders and hauls them before the king fully anticipating for them a death sentence. Rosaura is dressed as a man so that she can safely travel alone and also so that she can seek redress for some undisclosed slight of honor.

Clotaldo's sword is an interesting symbol. After having sex—probably forcibly—with Violante, Clotaldo, then a young adventurer, gave her his personal sword. He informed Violante that should she have a son, the sword could be used as a token of recognition. Violante has given the sword to Rosaura but has not informed her of its purpose, other than claiming that in Poland it will bring her assistance of some sort. When Clotaldo sees the sword, he immediately concludes that Rosaura is his son. This places him in the awkward position of having to arrest his own son for a capital crime. Clotaldo rather feebly concludes that if the king insists upon death—the most likely course of action—then his son will die in ignorance of their relationship. In the unlikely event that the king should spare Rosaura, Clotaldo will then, so he thinks, make known his relationship and assists his supposed son to seek redress for his slight of honor. Obviously, Clotaldo is more concerned with his personal honor and station than he is with the welfare of his progeny. This should not be surprising given his past behavior and abandonment.

Act 1, Second Scene (p. 303-313)

Act 1, Second Scene (p. 303-313) Summary

The second scene of Act 1 transpires in a hallway in the Royal palace of the capital city—probably Warsaw. Astolfo and Estrella, each accompanied by a retinue of soldiers and ladies-in-waiting, face off in the hallway. Through explanatory dialogue, they each claim to have arrived in the palace desiring to be declared as heir to the throne of Poland. Estrella is the daughter of the late Clorilene, and Astolfo the son of the late Recisunda. Both women were sisters to the king of Poland, Basilio. Estrella claims the throne as the eldest child of the eldest daughter; whereas, Astolfo's claim lies in the fact of his gender. Astolfo suggests that the two cousins marry, and thus reunite the rival claims into an unassailable situation. Estrella is not adverse to the suggestion but does not immediately accept. Astolfo praises Estrella's physical beauty. Their private conversation ends when Basilio, King of Poland, enters. His nephew and his niece both trip over each other in their anxiousness to impress the king with their devotion.

Basilio then delivers a long monologue. He first expresses happiness at receiving his relatives. He confesses that his many years have made him tired; he desires to abdicate his throne to pursue personal goals. Then he explains that he is a master astrologer—knowing another man's course of life is, for Basilio, as simple as looking up into the heavens. Basilio then makes a startling announcement—he, in fact, has a son named Segismundo. When Segismundo was born, Basilio had observed the astrological portents and discovered with alarm and dismay that Segismundo was fated to be a cruel tyrant, who would dominant his subjects and rule with horror. Thus a distraught Basilio had caused Segismundo to be sequestered as an infant. For the past many years, poor Segismundo has lived as an abject prisoner, entirely ignorant of his own heritage. Basilio then makes the irrational decision that regardless of the infallible stars' prediction, he will give Segismundo one chance to redeem himself. Should the price prove cruel and despotic, as Basilio expects, Segismundo will be returned to his prison, and Astolfo and Estrella will be married and, jointly, inherit Poland's throne. Astolfo, Estrella, and all assembled praise Basilio's actions, intelligence, and plan and then exit.

Clotaldo then arrives, bringing Rosaura and Clarnn along in chains. He explains to Basilio that they have been captured within the tower. Basilio, having just announced Segismundo's whereabouts and circumstances, declares that their crimes are forgiven and orders them released. Clotaldo is overjoyed but, strangely, decides to forbear telling Rosaura of their relation. Rosaura thanks Clotaldo for his clemency and announces that the man who has dishonored her is no other than Astolfo, the Duke of Muscovy. Clotaldo objects, claiming that Rosaura, as a subject of Astolfo, is logically incapable of receiving a blow of honor. Rosaura insists, however, exposing her true gender and stating that Astolfo has ravished her and then abandoned her, intending to marry Estrella. Rosaura, with Clarnn, exits. Clotaldo exclaims his surprise at the strange twist of fate.

Act 1, Second Scene (p. 303-313) Analysis

The second scene is dominated by three events. First, Basilio is old and desires to abdicate the throne of Poland. Astolfo and Estrella, rival claimants, agree with Basilio to marry and assume the throne with a united claim. But, second, prior to this event, Basilio desires to offer his legitimate heir a single chance at redemption. He therefore announces Segismundo's existence and explains why the hapless child has been chained in a prison cell since birth. As is to be expected, all of Basilio's subjects praise his intelligence and agree with his plan. Third, Rosaura and Clotaldo speak to each other. Rosaura exposes her true gender and declares that her opponent is Astolfo. Clotaldo, ever reticent with the truth, still does not announce his relation but urges Rosaura to yield her honor to Astolfo.

Basilio's plan is asinine, to say the least. Regardless of his star-crossed fate, Segismundo is clearly incapable of assuming the leadership of Poland—he has been sequestered in isolation for two decades and has only ever seen one other human's face. His only education has come via Clotaldo, and he has never even left his prison cell. How Basilio expects him to simply overcome these issues is questionable. Probably, Basilio feels guilty for Segismundo's condition and as a sop to his own conscience desires Segismundo to be paraded as a wild and bestial man. The strange wild child will surely prove unsatisfactory, and Basilio can then move ahead with his life, confirmed in his bizarre decisions.

The nature of Rosaura's dishonoring is probably forcible rape. Although the relationship between Astolfo and Rosaura is not fully explained, it is likened to the relationship between Clotaldo and Violante. Both circumstances appear to be a situation of rape, though in some translations they are offered more as a gross impropriety based on promises of future marriage. Violante's name and Astolfo's piggish and selfish nature, however, argue that the relationships were probably less than agreeable for Violante and Rosaura. In any event, Rosaura has been gravely dishonored and even the servile Clotaldo recognizes this. Instead of consoling her as her father, he urges her to drop the matter and go home. When she refuses, he states that he will help but urges inaction. Clotaldo apparently sympathizes rather more with Astolfo than his own daughter. Given that the play was written c. 1636, the plights of Rosaura and Violante are perhaps less pitiable to the intended audience than they appear to a modern sensibility.

Act 2, First Scene (p. 313 - 336)

Act 2, First Scene (p. 313 - 336) Summary

The first scene of Act 2 transpires in a room in the Royal palace of the capital city—probably Warsaw. Basilio and Clotaldo meet in private conference. Clotaldo explains that he has created a pacifying drink—a powerful narcotic—and has administered it to Segismundo while he was yet imprisoned in the distant tower. The drink caused Segismundo to fall into a profound slumber akin to death. Clotaldo then caused Segismundo to be removed from the tower and transported to the palace where he has been clothed in finery suitable for a prince. This has all been accomplished as Segismundo was unconscious, under the influence of the powerful drink. Basilio is pleased and explains that the transportation and drugged state will ensure that, should Segismundo prove untenable as a prince, he could be returned to the distant prison and subsequently convinced that his experiences in the royal palace were but a dream, however vivid. Basilio then departs as Clarnn arrives. Clotaldo closely queries Clarnn about Rosaura and learns that Rosaura has been accepted as a confidant by Estrella and is currently serving as a lady-in-waiting under the assumed identity, Astrea.

Segismundo then enters surrounded by sycophantic servants and dressed in finery. He expresses wonder, shock and amazement at his sudden transformation. Clotaldo informs him of the truth—he is the heir apparent; he has been raised a sequestered child through the decree of the king, but he has now been restored to the throne. Segismundo is outraged and threatens to kill Clotaldo as a treacherous liar. Clarnn interrupts and, playing the fool, gains Segismundo's respect. Astolfo arrives and pays his respects to the new prince of Poland; Segismundo treats him with disrespect and Astolfo takes offense. Estrella arrives and Segismundo, seeing for the first time a woman in all her finery, is immediately smitten with lust. Astolfo's loyal servant attempts to interpose himself between Segismundo and Estrella. After a momentary argument Segismundo flings the servant bodily from the balcony to his death. Astolfo admonishes Segismundo and urges him to restrain his temper and then leaves the room.

Basilio arrives and is informed about Segismundo's recent murder. He is shocked and urges Segismundo to restrain his base instincts. Segismundo reviles Basilio and threatens him with bodily injury, insulting him and accusing him of being a vile father. Basilio regrets both having Segismundo for a child and Basilio's decision to allow him out of captivity. Segismundo continues to vituperate the king. Basilio warns Segismundo that he might only be dreaming and then departs. Segismundo continues to rage.

Rosaura enters to attend to Estrella. Segismundo sees her and declares her familiar beauty to be beyond compare. He exclaims that his lust must be satisfied and moves to assault the hapless woman. Clotaldo intervenes, demanding that Segismundo treat Rosaura with the respect due her station. Segismundo demands that all depart so that he may rape Rosaura. Clotaldo refuses and Segismundo tries to stab him—the two men struggle briefly until the young and hale Segismundo flings Clotaldo to the floor. Astolfo

then reappears and effectively saves the situation by engaging Segismundo in a brief swordfight. Later, in the second scene of Act 3, Clotaldo will admit that Astolfo's timely intervention saved his life. Basilio reappears and demands the hostilities cease. Most of the company then exit amidst rumbling.

Astolfo, Estrella, and Rosaura remain behind. While Rosaura lurks in the wings, Astolfo again declares his love for Estrella and recommends they unite in marriage. Estrella hesitates, noting that Astolfo often wears a locket with the portrait of another woman—she refuses to be second fiddle. Astolfo says he will deliver the locket to Estrella as proof of his devotion, and he exits. Estrella then calls to Rosaura, explains that Astolfo will deliver the locket and she will then marry her cousin. She instructs Rosaura to await Astolfo and take possession of the locket, then she exits. Rosaura wonders what to do, then determines to wait for Astolfo as she has been instructed.

Astolfo returns and recognizes Rosaura. Rosaura attempts to deny her identity and demand the locket; Astolfo refuses. Rosaura attempts to seize the locket by force and a struggle ensues. Estrella enters and demands they cease, then demands the locket and Astolfo delivers it. Estrella sees that the portrait is of Rosaura and gives it to Rosaura, who departs. Astolfo then attempts to mollify Estrella with an abortive excuse, but she reviles him as a suitor and a claims he is a villain. Estrella departs and Astolfo calls after the fleeing Rosaura, accusing her of having wrecked his life.

Act 2, First Scene (p. 313 - 336) Analysis

The first scene in Act 2 is the most complicated scene of the play, and also one of the longest. It effectively sets up the tensions which will be solved in Act 3 and fully develops all of the characters except Segismundo. Although the scene is simple the action is complicated by a parade of characters that enter and leave throughout. In general, the scene deals with Segismundo's initial transportation from the prison tower to the royal palace. Under Basilio's direction Clotaldo prepares a powerful decoction and administers it to Segismundo—it acts like a narcotic and Segismundo passes out for a duration sufficient to transport him from the tower to the palace. Clotaldo goes to great lengths to convince Basilio that such a potion is credible, which is humorous because the monologue is obviously aimed at an incredulous audience. He states the potion is made of henbane, opium, and poppies—thus, a toxin mixed with narcotics. No wonder indeed that Segismundo awakens confused and partly delirious!

Consider Segismundo's situation—having been raised in chains his entire life, he is suddenly free and informed that he is the prince and may do whatever he would like. Without any social skills or even knowledge of social convention, he immediately commits a murder, hands out numerous insults, and then attempts rape. Basilio takes this gross activity as a clear indication that Basilio has been correct all along. But what other course of action could one reasonably expect from Segismundo? Basilio's singular failure to realize his own destructive influence in Segismundo's behavior illustrates how ridiculous the king of Poland has been. The failure of a single subject to suggest that, perhaps, Segismundo's behavior is the inescapable result of Basilio's stupid judgment

indicates the large problem of toadyism with monarchical states. At any rate, Basilio finds himself somehow justified and Segismundo goes back to his cell. Here subsequently (in the brief second scene of Act 2) enters the play's dominant theme of life being often confounded with a dream.

The scene ends with Rosaura confronting Astolfo and demanding back her portrait locket. Refused assistance by Clotaldo, Rosaura apparently feels that any meager satisfaction of honor will be acceptable; if she can reclaim her presumably stolen trinket, she can at least control Astolfo's ability to distress her in the future. Estrella, fairly submissive throughout the play, emerges in defense of Rosaura and casts off Astolfo as a base creature. It is interesting to compare the deprived upbringing of Segismundo with the opulent upbringing of Astolfo, the Duke of Muscovy, and note that both men prefer to abuse women and satisfy their base lust by force.

Act 2, Second Scene (p. 336-340)

Act 2, Second Scene (p. 336-340) Summary

The second scene of Act 2 transpires in Segismundo's tower cell. Clotaldo, Clarnn, and some servants have transported a drugged Segismundo back to his cell, where he has been once again outfitted in rough skins and encumbered with chains. After Segismundo is secure, Clotaldo has Clarnn cast into a cell also—now that Clarnn knows Segismundo's secret, he is a danger to the security of the kingdom. Basilio, in disguise, visits the cell and confides in Clotaldo that his recent escapade was probably an error. Basilio then departs and Segismundo awakens. Taken aback to be returned to a cell, Segismundo bemoans his unfortunate fate. Clotaldo listens and then explains that Segismundo surely had not left the cell—the palace, the women, the prince's finery were all but a dream. Convinced and saddened, Segismundo accepts his renewed fate. Clotaldo then suggests that even within dreams, doing right is still correct: "for even in a dream, remember, it's still worth doing what is right" (p. 339). Segismundo, resigned, accepts Clotaldo's counsel.

Act 2, Second Scene (p. 336-340) Analysis

The final scene in Act 2 summarizes the play's dominant theme—that of life being often confounded with a dream. Even though Segismundo's experiences were, for him, singular and remarkable, he is easily convinced by Clotaldo that they were merely a vivid dream. While this would normally be a silly narrative contrivance, the fact of Segismundo's peculiar upbringing makes his acquiescence to Clotaldo's suggestion credible. Having received two powerful doses of a crippling drug, Segismundo receives his tutor's instruction and accepts it at face value. His epiphany, and certainly the turning point of the play, comes with Clotaldo's statement that the right thing should be done even if one is dreaming. Segismundo accepts the advice and determines to so live henceforth, regardless of what the stars have fated for him. In fact, throughout the remainder of the play, Segismundo often wonders whether he is dreaming but never vacillates from his new determination to do what is right and let the consequence follow. Note that in some translations and editions the second act contains only a single scene.

Act 3, First Scene (p. 340 - 346)

Act 3, First Scene (p. 340 - 346) Summary

The first scene of Act 3 transpires within Segismundo's prison tower. Clarnn sits in his cell bemoaning his fate when he hears the far-off sound of drums, bugles and marching. After a moment several soldiers enter the prison and accost Clarnn, declaring him to be their prince and addressing him as Segismundo. The fool does not make the most of the misunderstanding, however, and the assembled soldiers quickly realize their mistake and subsequently address the real Segismundo. They inform him that they, and roughly half of Poland, have refused Basilio's edict—instead of being ruled by a joined Astolfo and Estrella, they demand their rightful heir in Segismundo. Segismundo is confused and convinced that he must once again be dreaming, though the soldiers assure him this is not the case. Clotaldo then rushes in and demands the soldiers desist; they decline. Segismundo, sorting out his confusion, realizes that once again Clotaldo has played him for the fool. Outraged, he says he should murder Clotaldo but instead dismisses the ever-loyal man, instructing him to go and serve Basilio. Segismundo then accepts the soldiers' offer, and they all march off to rebellious combat.

Act 3, First Scene (p. 340 - 346) Analysis

The first scene of Act 3 develops the dominant tension presented in the second half of the narrative. During the first two acts Segismundo has been entirely under the control of his father—even when allowed to do as he pleased, he was not allowed full freedom. Now, freed by the rebellious soldiers, he is placed in command of an army and is free to make his own fortune. He also demonstrates that from now on he will do what is right regardless of circumstances; when Clotaldo states that he must serve Basilio, rather than killing him in his rage, Segismundo masters his emotion and sends the man away, urging him to find and serve his king. Thus, the treasonous rebellion against the king begins with an act of clemency. Clotaldo, of course, immediately flees to Basilio and tells him what has been going on.

Act 3, Second Scene (p. 346 - 351)

Act 3, Second Scene (p. 346 - 351) Summary

The second scene of Act 3 transpires within a hall in the royal palace. Basilio and Astolfo discuss the treasonous rebellion half of Basilio's subjects. Astolfo begs leave of the king to rush to the site of military action and departs. Estrella then consults with Basilio and urges him to personally intervene in the rioting. Clotaldo rushes into the palace bringing news of Segismundo's escape and rebellious activities. Basilio and Estrella then leave for the battle ground. Rosaura enters and speaks with Clotaldo. Rosaura quickly recapitulates her dishonor and her hatred for Astolfo. Clotaldo confesses his abiding friendship in Rosaura and exclaims that Astolfo's actions have been indeed vile; nevertheless, he owes his life to Astolfo and finds himself in a quandary. Rosaura logically explains that Clotaldo's honor is based on an issue of lies—were he truly honorable he would avenge her wrongs by killing Astolfo. As usual, Clotaldo waffles and justifies his inaction by promising to allow Rosaura to inherit his estate. Rosaura then dismisses Clotaldo and states she will kill the Duke herself to restore her own honor. Faced with Rosaura's unyielding determination, Clotaldo follows lamely behind her, claiming once again he will attempt to assist. In point of fact, however, he goes to join Basilio.

Act 3, Second Scene (p. 346 - 351) Analysis

The second scene of Act 3 resolves nearly all of the interpersonal issues and minor themes which have been presented in the play. Astolfo rushes off in an attempt to secure Basilio's throne for himself. Clotaldo joins Basilio. Rosaura gives Clotaldo a final opportunity to defend her honor; of course, he declines). Rosaura then delivers what is arguably the most logical analysis of honor presented in the drama, but Clotaldo counters with a rather banal display of loyalty to perceived social superiors. The scene ends with Rosaura claiming her own destiny in an exciting and inspiring rapid exchange of one-line dialogue.

Act 3, Third Scene (351 - end)

Act 3, Third Scene (351 - end) Summary

The third scene of Act 3—the final scene in the play—transpires upon an open field. Segismundo, dressed in animal skins like a wild man, and his soldiers take the field of battle. Rosaura rides up dressed in the clothing of a peasant. In a nearly five-page monologue she recapitulates her history and announces she will join with Segismundo in fighting against Astolfo. Segismundo is, as always, smitten by lustful desire. In his confusion, he delivers a long monologue in which he wonders how Rosaura could know so many salient details about his previously-princely episode if it were merely a dream. Additionally, he wonders about the corrosive influence of physical lust. He then rides away from Rosaura, largely ignoring her request that she ride with him. She calls out for clarification, and he honestly answers that he must flee her presence, else perform some monstrous act of evil to satiate his lust.

Clarnn briefly hails Rosaura and then as a coward hides himself among some rocks to await the conclusion of the combat. Shortly Basilio, Clotaldo, and Astolfo take the field of battle with their soldiers. Shots ring out and one, despite his hiding place, finds Clarnn. He staggers from his hiding spot, delivers a rather peculiar and brief monologue, and then staggers away to die. The conflict quickly resolves in Segismundo's favor. Basilio regrets his loss. Clotaldo and Astolfo urge their king to flee, but Basilio determines to swallow the bitter pill of defeat. When Segismundo sweeps the field victorious, Basilio steps forward and offers himself as a sacrifice.

Segismundo then resolves the play by stating that he will henceforth act with restraint and show the proper respect due those about him. He ponders the nature of reality and life, notes Clotaldo as an able tutor, and begs his father stand and remain honorable. Basilio stands, recognizes Segismundo is a changed man and honors him. Segismundo then turns to lesser affairs—he decries Astolfo's treatment of Rosaura and commands him to marry her. In an astonishing show of hubris Astolfo declines, stating that Rosaura is beneath his station. Finally, Clotaldo steps forward and vouches for her—he claims her as his daughter and, as such, she is nobly born and thus a suitable match for Astolfo. Faced with no escape, Astolfo agrees to take Rosaura in marriage, thus restoring her honor. Segismundo then proposes to Estrella, offering his own hand in marriage. She graciously accepts.

A nearby soldier then has the temerity to interject that if Segismundo is handing out rewards, he should remember the soldiers. Although now master of his emotion, Segismundo is apparently still keenly aware of station and refuses to allow a common soldier to speak beyond his rank. The new king, Segismundo, declares that the insolent soldier will be transported to his old cell where he will spend the rest of his life.

Act 3, Third Scene (351 - end) Analysis

Act 3 is distinct in having three scenes; whereas, the other acts have only two. The third scene offers the play's final resolution to both dominant controversies presented—Segismundo encounters Basilio and Rosaura encounters Astolfo. The scene opens when Rosaura locates Segismundo, pledges her loyalty to his cause because he is opposed to Astolfo and then petitions him for redress from Astolfo's dishonor. Segismundo is strangely mute and then rides away without much of an explanation. When Rosaura demands an answer she receives one which is shockingly honest—Segismundo is determined to do right even though his hold over his base lust is very tenuous. Thus, he must leave her presence before he loses control and seizes her by force. This is a critical juncture in the play and demonstrates that Segismundo is in fact a developed, believable, and human character and not merely a caricature.

Clarnn is dealt with rather harshly, but, after all, he is only a fool. His failure to select any social authority and consistently serve him or her with dedication dooms him within the context of the play—he receives a stray bullet and is slain as he cowers within the putative protection of some large rocks. His death signals the victory of Segismundo's forces over those of Basilio and Astolfo. Basilio then approaches Segismundo and offers himself captive; once again Segismundo demonstrates his self-mastery by honoring his father and making several wise proclamations.

Astolfo's final act in the play is truly beyond the pale—he openly acknowledges dishonoring Rosaura but dismisses her as a simple peasant girl unworthy of his station. When he learns that she is the daughter of the nobleman Clotaldo he reluctantly accepts her. It is difficult to determine who is more horrid—the piggish Astolfo or the spineless Clotaldo. At any rate, Rosaura must consider herself rehabilitated by accepting marriage with her erstwhile attacker, which is a strange restoration of honor indeed. The play makes a final nod to the upper classes when Segismundo condemns a worthless peasant soldier to a life of imprisonment for having the temerity to request a reward for ensconcing the new king upon the throne. The play is clearly from a bygone era! Note that in some translations and editions the third act contains only two scenes.

Characters

Astolfo

Astolfo, the duke of Muscovy, is Basilio's nephew. Basilio has summoned him to Poland to become king if Segismundo proves unworthy. As his name suggests, there is something wolfish about him. He has seduced and abandoned Rosaura. He is presented, however, as a ludicrous, rather than villainous, figure when Estrella rejects him. There are also streaks of decency and honor in him, which become evident, for example, when he protects Clotaldo from Segismundo.

Basilio

Basilio is the king of Poland, a mathematician, and a scholar. Fearing, because of a horoscope reading, that Segismundo will grow up to overthrow him and become a tyrannical ruler, Basilio has kept Segismundo locked up in a tower since birth. Basilio's position as a ruler and a seeker of wisdom is reinforced by the celestial imagery surrounding him.

Clarin

Clarin is a chatterbox. His name suggests a clarion, or high-pitched trumpet. He accompanies Rosaura to Poland and offers witty, cynical, and philosophical comments about the action of the play. For a brief moment, a mob mistakes him for Segismundo and almost makes him king. He is killed during a battle, though he is in hiding and not fighting. He represents the impossibility of staying aloof from the action of life, as he attempts to, even if life is illusory.

Clotaldo

Clotaldo is an old man in Basilio's court who serves as a jailer and tutor to Segismundo in his tower. He is portrayed as constantly torn by divided loyalty. Still, he always acts honorably, though in his past he has been dishonorable, having seduced but not married Violante, who gave birth to his daughter, Rosaura.

Estrella

Estrella is Basilio's niece. He expects that she will marry Astolfo and rule over Poland with him if Segismundo proves unworthy to be king. Her name means *star*; when Segismundo marries her at the end of the play, after he has triumphed over the brutal aspects of himself, it signifies his reconciliation with the stars, for it was in the stars (his horoscope) that Basilio had seen Segismundo's evil destiny recorded.

Rosaura

Although she does not know it, Rosaura is the illegitimate daughter of Clotaldo. Disguised as a man and accompanied by Clarin, she has followed Astolfo to Poland to force him to marry her and restore her honor, which he had taken from her when he seduced and then left her. Her name means *rosy dawn*, and, as her name suggests, she awakens new perception in Segismundo, when, through her, he achieves enlightenment about the meaning of honor.

Segismundo

Segismundo is Basilio's son. He has lived his life unaware of his identity, imprisoned by his father because Basilio feared□after charting Segismundo's horoscope□that he would grow into a treacherous son and savage ruler. When Basilio devises a ruse to free him from his prison for a day and give him the power of a king, Segismundo's brutal behavior confirms his father's fear, and he is returned to prison. After he is liberated from the tower a second time, he overcomes his brutality and his predestined identity. Segismundo is often described by himself or by others as a beast or a force of nature. He is clothed in animal skins, and he contrasts himself with fish, snakes, streams, and volcanoes. Before Segismundo is taken to the court, Clotaldo fills his mind with the image of himself as an eagle. The meaning of his name, however, stands in contrast to the predatory imagery surrounding him and indicates his triumph over an unchangeable fate written in the stars. *Segismundo* is derived from the German words *sige*, meaning □victory,□ and *mund*, meaning □protector.□

Objects/Places

Poland

The play is set in the kingdom of Poland, c. 1630. Although Poland is noted on several occasions, nothing about the country or kingdom is specifically required for the play's success—in other words, the play could just as easily and successfully be set in nearly any Feudal European nation. Most of the characters, including Basilio, Segismundo, Clotaldo, and Estrella are Poles.

Muscovy

Several references are made to Muscovy, a kingdom which either borders or at least is near Poland. Historically, Muscovy referred to a Duchy near present-day Moscow. Although Muscovy is noted on several occasions, nothing about the region is specifically required for the play's success except that it is rather adjacent to Poland. Several of the characters, including Astolfo, Rosaura, and Clarnn, are Muscovites.

The Stars and Segismundo's Fate

Poor Segismundo is locked into a tower as an infant and not allowed to leave his prison cell until he is an adult. This fate is caused by the alignment of the stars upon his birth. Segismundo's father, Basilio the king of Poland and a noted astrologer, thought that Segismundo's star-crossed fate doomed Segismundo to be a bloodthirsty and dreadful tyrant, and thus Basilio caused Segismundo to be locked away. Although Basilio's action in isolating Segismundo could in and of itself cause Segismundo's fate to occur, Basilio's interpretation of the stars appears to have been incorrect as Segismundo chooses a different "fate" for himself. And this may well be another pivotal theme of the narrative: One's fate is not determined by the stars, but rather by the choices each individual makes.

Segismundo's Tower Prison

Segismundo is raised in a cell in a prison tower. The cell contains chains and a locking door and is described as bleak. The tower itself stands near a rocky precipice. The tower is one of three settings used in the play.

Segismundo's Clothes of Skins

When Segismundo is imprisoned at the tower, he wears chains and the skins of animals. This contrasts with the fine clothes of royalty he wears during his initial visit to

the palace. While clothed as an animal, Segismundo generally acts as an honorable man, but while clothed as a king, he behaves like an animal.

Clotaldo's Potion

Clotaldo fashions a potion akin to poison, which causes Segismundo to fall into a deep stupor very much like death. He goes to great lengths to explain how such a potion is possible. The potion, used twice, has powerful effects on Segismundo and allows Clotaldo to convince Segismundo that Segismundo's initial sojourn in the royal palace was simply a very realistic dream.

Clotaldo's Sword

After a young and adventuring Clotaldo has his way with Violante, he gives her his sword. He apparently intends for the sword to be a recognition symbol should his sexual assault of Violante result in a son. In fact, Violante gives birth to a female child, Rosaura. The apparently-wise and liberated Violante sends Rosaura to Poland with the sword on a quest to regain the family honor. The sword, wielded by Rosaura, is recognized by Clotaldo. Instead of announcing his responsibility, however, he holds his tongue.

Rosaura's Locket

After having his way with Rosaura, Astolfo leaves her in Muscovy as he travels to Poland to court his cousin, the royal Estrella. Astolfo takes from Rosaura a locket bearing Rosaura's likeness. Rosaura believes this theft to be the height of insult and, determined to salvage her honor, travels to Poland seeking Astolfo. During the play she demands the return of the locket and manages to obtain it.

The Royal Palace

The Royal Palace of Poland, probably in Warsaw, is the primary setting of the play. Like the tower prison, it is poorly described. In fact, all that can be derived from the play is that the royal palace contains at least one hall, at least one room and is richly appointed. Since Basilio leaves the palace to seek battle in the open field, it is safe to assume the palace is not fortifying to any meaningful degree.

The Field of Battle

A field is the third and final setting used in the play. On the field Segismundo and Basilio briefly skirmish to establish military superiority during a rebellion. Segismundo emerges victorious. The field has no descriptive text and is not referred to directly by the

combatants. It is at least adjacent to a large pile of boulders, however, because Clarnn hides in a gap between large rocks and is subsequently shot.

Themes

Certainty

The impossibility of certainty dominates the action of *Life Is a Dream*, presenting two fundamental problems: 1) How can one be sure of anything? and 2) What are the consequences of uncertainty? Before Basilio tests Segismundo, the problem of uncertainty is introduced in the figure of Rosaura at the beginning of the play, and the audience is implicated in the problem as much as the characters of the play are. The audience cannot be certain what it is seeing or what is happening. Perception is deception. In Rosaura, spectators behold a man who soon reveals that he is a woman. The identity of Segismundo and the reason for his confinement are also mysteries, as are the nature and cause of Rosaura's confessed dishonor. She does not know who will recognize the sword she bears and protect her. Clotaldo, in turn, is tormented by uncertainty that continues throughout the play. Where ought his loyalty lie? In the first instance, should it be with his child or with his king? Later, should it be with Rosaura or with Astolfo, the man who dishonored her?

Even as the audience learns the answers to the mysteries of scene 1, the theme of uncertainty is only strengthened as the play proceeds. The strategy Basilio employs to determine whether the destiny written in the stars is fixed and certain or can be influenced□making Segismundo believe that he has been dreaming events that have actually occurred□results in making Segismundo always uncertain as to whether he is asleep or awake. By extension, the problem the play presents regards the certainty of all experience. Is life real, or is it a dream? The resolution of the problem is achieved by the unification of the opposites. Reality, being a matter of perception, itself is a dream. Because human happiness comes to an end, experience must not be overvalued and clung to. In the play, generosity and magnanimity follow from that awareness.

Free Will and Determinism

At the heart of *Life Is a Dream* is the problem of whether destiny is fixed or if people can affect and even alter what appears to be their destiny. When Basilio studies the stars before Segismundo's birth, he learns that they show that the child will grow up to be a brutal and tyrannical prince who will dishonor his father. In an attempt to control fate, Basilio has Segismundo imprisoned. In an attempt to test the strength of individual will in the face of destiny, Basilio arranges for Segismundo's release. When Segismundo behaves as his horoscope predicted, it seems that determinism has triumphed. But in the last act, Segismundo himself, addressing the court, questions the power of determinism by noting that even if he had been a mild-mannered person, the brutal way his father had him raised would have transformed him into a beast. It was not just the stars that determined his nature but also his father's intervention. Segismundo conquers his destiny by overcoming the rage and lust within himself when he realizes that life is an illusion that will end but that actions that are just will endure.

Honor and Duty

The theme of honor, presented in Rosaura's quest to find Astolfo, determines the subplot of *Life Is a Dream*. According to the play, honor means living according to one's duty, and duty means recognizing the integrity and humanity of others and not violating them. Rosaura, in pursuit of her own honor, is the instrument that moves Segismundo to act honorably. By overcoming his self-centered desire, his lust to possess Rosaura, and by helping her to redeem her honor through ensuring that Astolfo marry her, Segismundo redeems himself and defines himself as a man, not as a beast. He is able, consequently, to forgive Basilio and spare his life.

Life is a Dream

The basic theme of the play is the confusion between life and dreaming; that is, within life are dreams and within dreams, life. Thus characters must wonder whether experiences are real or are simply part of a dream. The theme, though somewhat hackneyed through repetitive examination in modern literature, is still somewhat intriguing at the time period of the play's origination.

The dominant example of the theme is found with the principle antagonist Segismundo. Raised his entire life as a prisoner in a tower, he is drugged into unconsciousness and transported to the royal palace. Upon awakening he is treated as the Prince and informed that he will shortly ascend to the throne of Poland. His bestial manner offends his father, however, and Segismundo is again drugged and transported back to his tower prison. When he awakens, he is informed that his princely episode was merely a hyper-real dream. Segismundo thereafter delivers several lengthy monologues examining the implications of being unable to distinguish reality from dreams.

Other characters offer supporting material to the theme. For example, the imprisoned Clarnn speculates about his fate and wonders aloud whether he might be so fortunate as to discover that his imprisonment is a dream from which he might awaken. A secondary theme also supports the theme of life being simply a dream; Clotaldo postulates that a life without honor is not a life at all and Rosaura temporarily takes up Clotaldo's beliefs. Thus, if honor robbed demotes life to something else, within the context of the play the only alternative is a dream. Hence, life without honor might as well be simply a dream.

The Sequestered Child

When Segismundo is born, Basilio, his father and the king of Poland, performs a process of astrological analysis. Basilio determines that his son—a prince destined to rule—will be a tyrant and will inflict great harm upon the kingdom and upon the citizens. To this end Basilio orders Segismundo shut into a tower prison upon a remote, craggy peak. Segismundo is raised in total captivity, apparently never even leaving his cell within the tower prison. His only human contact is with a handful of guards and an aged

tutor named Clotaldo who instructs him in basic academia. Thus, Segismundo is raised to adulthood without ever having seen a woman, without ever having a friend, and without ever experiencing the larger world except through books and Clotaldo's representations.

Much of the play focuses on Segismundo's reactions when he is not only released from prison but informed that he is, by divine right, prince and future heir to the throne. His first acts are variously outrageous, such as flinging a man to his death and attempting to rape a woman. Within a few hours he has offended nearly everyone with whom he has contact and engaged in a swordfight with his cousin. His final act of gross defiance is to threaten his own father, the king. His malicious behavior satisfies Basilio that he had ordered a valid course of action at the birth of his son. Segismundo is, indeed, a wild and unrestrained man who willingly yields to his baser passions.

Basilio apparently does not stop to consider that Segismundo is a creature of his conditioning—raised in total isolation and without any effective instruction in social or moral considerations, Segismundo could little more react appropriately when freed than he could travel to the moon. Thus, in many respects, Basilio's actions have assured that Basilio's dire forecast will come true. Basilio has created a monster by depriving Segismundo of a normal upbringing.

Overcoming Fate

The basic premise of the play involves the fate, or destiny, of Segismundo. Shortly after the birth of the prince, Segismundo, Basilio, the king, consults astrological portents only to discover that Segismundo is fated to be a cruel ruler and a tyrant over his kingdom and subjects. Basilio, like most kings, has an undeserved respect for his own intellect and ability to control events and therefore determines that Segismundo must be raised in total isolation and not be informed of his royal heritage.

Seemingly, Basilio has conquered fate—after all, Segismundo not only does not rule as a cruel tyrant, but he is completely unaware that he is a prince. Imprisoned in his distant tower, it is doubtful that Segismundo is aware of much of anything. But once again, Basilio is unable to resist the allure of his own intellect. As an aged king, he desires his heir to assume the throne—if only fate could be cheated. He therefore orders Segismundo to be drugged, brought to the palace, and informed of his true character. Presumably, the drugging will allow Segismundo to be more easily manipulated in the future should things go awry. As predicted, Segismundo acts the brute, and Basilio quickly orders him drugged again and transported back to prison. Obviously, Basilio lacks the ability to overcome Segismundo's fate.

Segismundo, however, is given a second chance. He holds a brief discussion with Clotaldo, who insists that honorable conduct is always necessary—even if life should prove but a dream. When Segismundo is released by a rebellious mob, he takes Clotaldo's instruction to heart and behaves as a magnanimous prince, apparently

overcoming his own fate. The question of whether one's fate can be escaped through diligent effort is one of the dominant themes of the play.

Style

Comedia

Life Is a Dream is a *comedia*, a form of Spanish drama perfected at the beginning of the seventeenth century by the great Spanish playwright Lope de Vega and codified in his 1609 treatise *El arte nuevo de hacer comedias en este sieglo* (The New Art of Playwriting in This Century). *Comedia* is verse drama in three acts. In the first act, the issues are introduced. In the second, they are developed. In the third, they are resolved. *Comedia* mixes comic and serious elements and features intrigue, disguise, swordplay, and battles.

Conflict between Characters and Ideas

There are two sorts of conflicts that shape the plot of *Life Is a Dream*. There are conflicts between characters, such as the conflict between Basilio and Segismundo or Astolfo and Rosaura or Astolfo and Estrella. There are also clashes of ideas, like that between free will and determinism or between self-interest and forgiveness or between illusion and reality. These tensions, more than those between characters, determine the course of action in the play and are at the heart of the conflicts between the characters. The conflict binding Astolfo and Rosaura, for example, is one between honor and selfishness or justice and greed. The father/son conflict joining Basilio and Segismundo also serves as the vehicle that permits conflicts between free will and determinism and between illusion and reality to be represented.

Gongorism

Gongorism is the name given to the ornate style of verse in which Calderón wrote. It is named for the poet Luis de Góngora y Argote (1561-1627). This style is characterized by references to mythology, stylistic excesses, and complexity of language and thought. Readers of an English translation will not be able to experience it fully but may get a lingering sense of it in such passages as this at the opening of the play: □Wild hippogriff, running swift as the wind, flash without flame, bird without color, fish without scales, unnatural beast, where are you wildly rushing in the intricate labyrinth of these bare rocks?□ Another example is in Segismundo's first speech in the play's first scene: □The bird is born, with the gaudy plumage that gives it unrivalled beauty; and scarcely is it formed, like a flower of feathers or a winged branch, when it swiftly cuts the vaulted air, refusing the calm shelter of its nest.□

Point of View

The play is delivered in the third-person, omniscient point of view common to virtually all theater. Characters state their opinions through dialogue. Monologues are often used by

characters to establish motivation or reveal prior or secret events. Frequent asides are directed at the audience and are intended to convey either subtle humor or otherwise-unknowable information.

Characterization within the play is limited and most of the play's development is focused on situational paradigms; Segismundo attempts to gain his rightful throne; Astolfo attempts to spurn Rosaura and pursue Estrella; Clotaldo attempts to assert his honor but also to serve his monarch. The relative plights of the characters are not particularly subtle and only Segismundo's situation is unique. Given this relatively simple background, the routinely-employed point of view selected is appropriate and allows the play to be delivered without interference or artifice, and contributes notably to the play's accessibility.

Setting

The play's setting is not critical to the dramatic action; in fact, it could be just as easily set in nearly any European country during a period of several hundred years. The general setting of the play is seventeenth-century, monarchical Poland, though there is not much to distinguish the general area from any other seventeenth-century monarchical state. A few references are made to Muscovy,but no action directly occurs in Muscovy. The chronological time of the play is established only insofar as a pistol is mentioned, but swords are the typical weapon; e.g., the play is intended to transpire c. 1630. The sovereign monarch is considered by all to be equivalent to the state itself.

Specific settings within Poland include the exterior and interior of a desolate prison tower atop a craggy peak, a hall in the royal palace, a room in the royal palace and an open field. Although the relative positions of the three locales are not specified, the field is most likely somewhere between the prison tower and the royal palace, and the latter two locations are probably in close proximity—no more than a day's travel apart. The royal palace is probably not fortress-like because the king leaves the structure to meet the enemy in battle on the open field. Virtually no direction is given for furnishings or construction; the prison tower contains cells with chains and poor appointments; whereas, the royal palace is presumably well-decorated.

Language and Meaning

The play was originally written in Spanish and first published in 1636. A second Spanish-language, revised edition with several notable errors was also published in 1636. Further Spanish-language revised editions appeared in 1640, and Spanish-language unauthorized editions have appeared since 1670. Yet another Spanish-language revision was published in 1685. During the play's first year of production, Dutch and Italian translations were published. By 1693, a second Dutch, a second Italian, and a German adaptation of the play had been published. During the early 1700s, several French and additional Italian versions were published. A Russian-language edition was published in 1861. By 1870, at least seventeen more German-

language adaptations, revisions, and editions had been published. The first English-language translation was published in 1830, and since that time at least seven additional English-language translations have been published. The quality of the English-language adaptations varies tremendously with some being nearly unreadable and others only loosely aligning with the original play. It is quite remarkable to contrast two disparate translation versions to discover that not only does the language vary tremendously, but even the scene divisions are not placed in the same positions.

Meaning within the play is derived almost entirely from language. The settings are very basic, and stage direction is limited to only a few events. For example, "*[ASTOLFO draws his sword and they duel.],*" but even this action is directly explained in dialogue before and after the action. The Spanish-language version of the text presents several word-play constructions which are lost in translation. For example, the beauty of the character Estrella is frequently compared to the stars.

Structure

The seventy-eight-page play is divided into three Acts. Introductory front matter consists of a few pages of commentary and the character board. Act 1 consists of two scenes and twenty-one pages; Act 2 consists of two scenes and twenty-eight pages; Act 3 consists of three scenes and twenty-five pages. Note that scenes, as such, are not specifically called out in the play's structure. The play includes a small cast with only seven named characters and a handful of unnamed type roles. Many of the unnamed characters can be utilized in several roles and in a small production, even some of the named characters could be used in several type roles.

The dramatic action is fairly limited and stage directions typically include only basic directions such as '*aside*', '*aloud*', '*enter*', and '*exit*'. The bulk of the play is delivered as dialogue and outside of a few brisk exchanges, the majority of the dialogue is delivered in fairly-extended monologues. The dialogue has several instances where the speaking character addresses the audience directly in a type of meta-fictional aside. These statements are generally explanatory in nature, although the closing lines, as is often the case, beg acceptance from the audience in spite of any presentation errors.

Historical Context

The Golden Age in Spain

The period between 1580 and 1680 is called the Golden Age in Spain, when art and literature flourished. The first part of *Don Quixote*, by Miguel de Cervantes (1547-1616), was published in 1605. In this novel, Cervantes plays with the shifting boundaries between reality and perception and introduces, in the figure of Don Quixote, a character who shows the influence of literature on consciousness. Lope de Vega's *Fuente ovejuna*, or *The Sheep Well* (performed in 1614), dramatizes a village rebellion against an authoritarian governor, in which the characters realize both a group identity and individual identities. In 1630, Tirso de Molina (ca. 1580-1648) first introduced the character of Don Juan in his play *El burlador de Sevilla*, or *The Love Rogue*. The Don is a figure who embodies the Renaissance passions, defining himself by his appetite and by his defiance of convention. During the period between 1597 and 1614, the year of his death, the artist El Greco (1541-1614) produced more than a dozen paintings that have come to be regarded as masterpieces, including the *Laocoon* and the *View of Toledo*. And between 1620 and 1660, Diego Velázquez (1599-1660) produced work of such brilliance that he is considered to be Spain's greatest painter. The paintings of El Greco and Velázquez embody the terror of being human, the struggle to be human, and the breadth of vision and depth of character humanity can achieve.

Politics

The hundred years between 1550 and 1650 were marked by power conflicts that combined political and religious issues and took place within and between nations. In Spain, the power of the Roman Catholic Church was enforced by the courts of the Inquisition, which could punish deviations from accepted doctrine, and by the Index, a list of books that were banned by the Catholic Church because they threatened accepted religious truth. While these measures strengthened the power of religion, they also nurtured underground Protestant and humanist opposition.

Protestant leaders like Martin Luther (1483-1546) attacked the power of the pope and the Church's practice of selling indulgences. Indulgences were supposed to lessen the time the purchaser of the indulgence would spend in purgatory after death. Protestant reformers like Luther also believed that the Bible ought to be available to each Christian, in the vernacular languages rather than only Church Latin or the original Greek. They believed that the Bible, not the Church fathers, ought to be the ultimate religious authority.

Protestant reformers were often originally closely allied with humanists. Humanists were scholars like the Dutch-born Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536). Their philosophy grew out of the study of the Greek and Latin classics and an appreciation of their literary qualities, their grace, and their structure. Humanists sought excellence in humankind

itself and focused on the study of humankind and nature rather than on the nature of God and divine phenomena, which was called Scholasticism.

Spanish influence also extended to England when, in 1553, Queen Mary I, attempting to return England to Catholicism after Henry VIII's break with Rome in 1534, married Spain's king, Philip II. She died four years later and was succeeded by her Protestant sister, who became Queen Elizabeth I and whose navy defeated the Spanish armada in 1588. Spain also at this time was defending other territories it held in Europe, including parts of Italy and the Netherlands, and it was establishing itself as a major colonial power in the New World and struggling with the Turkish Ottoman Empire for the northern coast of Africa.

Cultural Changes

The period in which Calderón lived was particularly vital because of the encounter and contention of two ways of understanding the world. The medieval organization of society and thought essentially was formed by an adherence to doctrines of well-defined religious and secular order. The Renaissance, with the resurgence of classical learning, global exploration, individualism, and challenges to one dogmatically established religion, destabilized and threatened medieval values and truths. □Man,□ who lived in the Middle Ages under the yoke of authority, in the Renaissance, had become the measure of all things.

Critical Overview

From its first appearance in 1635 up through the present, *Life Is a Dream* has enjoyed acclaim and popularity. It was first printed in Madrid in an edition edited by Calderón's brother José in 1636. Reprinted along with all of Calderón's work by his friend and biographer Juan de Vera Tassis y Villaroel in a reliable and readable edition in the years immediately following his death in 1681, it was readily available in Spain and to translators, even when Spanish drama itself was in decline.

One of the earliest translators of Calderón's work into English was the romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, whose 1822 notebook shows translations from *La vida es sueño* as well as from other of Calderón's works. In the 1850s, the Irish poet Denis Florence MacCarthy published translations of Calderón's works, and in 1858, Edward FitzGerald, best known for his translation of *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, freely translated *La vida es sueño* into blank verse, calling his version *Such Stuff as Dreams Are Made Of*.

During the twentieth century, the play was translated into English a number of times and was never off the stage for very long. In 2002, it was produced off Broadway and presented at Oxford. In 2005, it was produced independently at the Stage Center Theatre at Northeastern Illinois University, at the University of Colorado in Boulder, and at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. In 2000, Lewis Spratlan's opera of *Life Is a Dream*, with a libretto by James Maraniss, won the Pulitzer Prize in Music. In 1925, the great Austrian poet and playwright Hugo von Hofmannsthal wrote a German adaptation of it called *Der Turm* (*The Tower*) in order to reflect the chaotic pre-fascist climate in Germany.

Life Is a Dream has also been the subject of much academic criticism concerned with analyzing its structure, philosophy, and mythic quality, as Frederick A. De Armas does in *The Return of Astraea: An Astral-Imperial Myth in Calderón*. Examining its natural, animal, and celestial imagery, De Armas asserts that in *Life Is a Dream* □Calderón mirrors . . . eternal truth, revealing aspects of the heavenly text inscribed in stars and souls in a work that aims at transcending conflict through a vision of wonderment at the ways in which God's creation unfolds.□

There is one aspect of *Life Is a Dream* that many critics find troublesome. □The very critics who were unanimous in placing *La vida es sueño* among the greatest of Spanish and world plays were equally unanimous in condemning its subplot, regarding it not merely as a useless adjunct, but as an action which seriously detracted from the play's unity,□ A. E. Sloman observes. In □The Structure of Calderón's *La vida es sueño*,□ he goes on to demonstrate that by representing honor and by serving as a catalyst for Segismundo's conversion, □the Rosaura episode . . . is clearly . . . no mere afterthought to fill out the required three acts□ but is □linked . . . to the main episode and related . . . to the play's central theme.□

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Heims is a writer and teacher living in Paris. In this essay, he considers how Calderón uses the very uncertainty of perception that is central to the drama of Life Is a Dream *as the force that enables the human exercise of free will.*

When Rosaura appears during the first moments of *Life Is a Dream*, descending from the craggy mountains where her wild flying horse has left her, the audience is confronted by ambiguity and uncertainty. The unreliability of sense perception, one of the problems around which the entire play revolves, is presented in this scene. Rosaura appears to be a man; yet, when that man begins to talk, despite appearances, the man is a woman: "Unkindly, O Poland, do you receive a stranger; for you inscribe her arrival in your land with blood; and hardly does she arrive, but she comes to grief." As it draws the audience into the action of the drama, the opening speech of the play also burdens the audience with the same problem that the characters of the drama face. The spectators are forced to reevaluate and reconfigure their first impressions and to doubt appearances. What they saw, or rather, what they *thought* they saw, is not what is. Reality, as it is constructed in *Life Is a Dream*, is not fixed. It shifts. Things are ambiguous—and so is human possibility. The ambiguity of things that seem definite is the principal theme of *Life Is a Dream*, the idea that unifies its elements, and the condition that gives meaning to the play's other central concern—the conflict between free will and determinism.

Segismundo, the wild beast of a man Rosaura finds amid the mountains, imprisoned in a tower and clothed in animal skins, speaks nevertheless with the grace, facility, and learning of a Renaissance courtier and laments his condition with a poet's eloquence and passion. Wretched like her, he may also be something other than what he seems. Indeed, Basilio, the king of Poland, confirms that fact in the ensuing scene. Segismundo is a prince, his own son. Basilio imprisoned him in the tower at his birth, because in his study of the stars, it appeared to Basilio that Segismundo would grow up to be a rebellious son and a tyrannical ruler, humiliating his father and oppressing the nation. But Basilio is troubled by the sense that he may have acted tyrannically against the threat of tyranny. To make sure that his action, even if driven by his mathematical wisdom and motivated by concern for the good, was not tyranny but a justified act of preventive punishment, Basilio has decided to release Segismundo from his prison and let him rule Poland for a day. Should he prove benevolent, Basilio will yield authority to him, happy that Segismundo can exercise a freedom of will that is stronger than cosmic predestination. Should Segismundo's behavior confirm the destiny Basilio saw written in the stars, however, Basilio will know that he was justified in imprisoning his son. Segismundo will be returned to prison, and, to prevent him from falling into despair, he will be told that he was dreaming.

After Segismundo uses his power badly and is returned to prison and told that he only dreamed he was a prince, he never again is able to be sure when he is awake and when he is dreaming. He cannot tell whether he is definitely a prisoner or definitely a prince. How can he be both? Yet he perceives that he is. Thus, taught by ambiguity and

uncertainty that experience is not a proof of actuality, Segismundo realizes that he is neither prisoner nor prince in reality, for there may not be any reality. He is not defined by what he perceives but by himself no matter what he perceives□that is, by how he chooses to act. If everything is illusion and life is a dream, it is not important what Seigismundo perceives or thinks is real. The only thing that matters and that he can be sure of is how he behaves.

Basilio, too, is deceived in his strategy. Contrary to his belief, when Segismundo acts like a brute on his day of trial, it does not serve as a definite proof that determinism is stronger than free will, as Basilio had feared. Segismundo himself, in the last scene of the play, makes the sound argument that it was not his star-determined destiny that was the cause of his brutality but the brutal way he was raised. It is the course his father chose, not the configuration of the stars, that has made him uncivilized. Basilio's will, influenced by his understanding of the stars, is just as likely the power that determined Segismundo's nature as the stars themselves. Segismundo is just as likely to have been taught by his experience to be brutal as his brutality was formed by destiny. His impulsive inability to exercise freedom of choice may just as likely derive from a lack of education of his will as from his inherent nature. The cause is uncertain. Destiny itself is not solely determinant: it is clear that, to be fulfilled, destiny needed Basilio's intervention. The problem that Segismundo and the play itself must confront is whether either sort of determinism□the fate written in the stars or the fate imposed by the force of human actions□can be overcome by free will. The answer in the play is that it can, through the human ability to choose. That is the power, when he exercises it, which liberates Segismundo from his fate.

What makes choice necessary and possible and marks it as an expression of free will, Calderón shows, is the fact of the ambiguity of perception and Segismundo's awareness of that ambiguity. Segismundo becomes free when he chooses, and he is able to choose because there are alternatives. Only after he is confronted with uncertainty does Segismundo realize that he can choose to act tyrannically or not. In his first encounter with power, at court, his actions explode impulsively from him. He is a force of raging desire, and what he wants seems to be palpably in front of him to take, if he would. In his second encounter with power, after the mob frees him from prison and he defeats Astolfo and Basilio, his sense of his own power has been tempered by his experience of uncertainty. Consequently, each of his actions becomes a matter for deliberation. In an apparently illusory world, Segismundo has realized that the only thing that is not illusory is the way he acts in relation to what surrounds him. By his actions, he can shape illusion. In the midst of instability, he can be the stable element. The exercise of free will, Calderón establishes in *Life Is a Dream*, is what conquers uncertainty and ambiguity. When he frees himself from his apparent destiny, Segismundo becomes the one who shapes destiny.

Ambiguity's defining characteristic is that it is all-encompassing. It contains alternatives and takes in mutually exclusive and opposing phenomena. Ambiguity suggests that there are fixed and yet distinct categories and, simultaneously, that something may not be what it seems. For a woman to be mistaken for a man, as Rosaura is, those two categories□male and female□must exist independently of each other. For a man to be

in doubt as to whether he is a prisoner or a prince, a beast or a man, those categories must exist independently of each other. Still, it must be possible for them to be confused with each other and, consequently, to be determined by behavior. Whether Segismundo is a prince or a beast may be unclear, but no matter which he is, he can choose to be either princely or beastly in either the prince or the beast role. The very ambiguity inherent in perception forces him to reject the power of perception and to rely on the authority of his own action.

In themselves, the characters in *Life Is a Dream* contain all possibilities, by virtue of their humanity, which is itself defined by ambiguity. Rosaura embodies the masculine in the first act, the feminine in the second, and both when she appears dressed like a woman but armed like a man in the third. Being at the center of ambiguity gives Segismundo the power to determine himself, to deliberate. This is a common Renaissance idea. It is expressed most unambiguously by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), a scholar who combined Neoplatonic Renaissance humanism and medieval Roman Catholic theology in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (ca. 1486), when he imagined God □taking man . . . this creature of indeterminate image,□ and saying to him:

We have given you, O Adam, no visage proper to yourself, nor endowment properly your own, in order that whatever place, whatever form, whatever gifts you may, with premeditation, select, these same you may have and possess through your own judgement and decision. The nature of all other creatures is defined and restricted within laws which We have laid down; you, by contrast, impeded by no such restrictions, may, by your own free will, to whose custody We have assigned you, trace for yourself the lineaments of your own nature. I have placed you at the very center of the world, so that from that vantage point you may with greater ease glance round about you on all that the world contains. We have made you a creature neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, in order that you may, as the free and proud shaper of your own being, fashion yourself in the form you may prefer. It will be in your power to descend to the lower, brutish forms of life; you will be able, through your own decision, to rise again to the superior orders whose life is divine.

In *Life Is a Dream*, the problem is this: In a world shaped by ambiguity and instability and governed by perception, what can determine how to act, if action, rather than perception or desire, is the only possible stabilizing force? How can humankind recognize what Pico della Mirandola shows as the divine stability and, by action, achieve something enduring rather than temporary? For Segismundo, it is by an act that achieves victory over himself. He has been □a man among wild beasts, and a beast among men.□ He becomes a man when he recognizes the otherness and humanity in Rosaura. Her power to bestow this gift on him is inherent in her situation and in what she represents. She is the abused maiden who seeks justice. As she seeks justice, so, too, does she represent Justice. The very name she takes in her conversation with Astolfo is Astrea, the heavenly Roman goddess of Justice, and through her person she brings the awareness of justice to Segismundo.

Segismundo realizes that the nature of his relationship to Rosaura is a matter of his choice and that it is not his perception of her that matters but his behavior toward her. In his first encounter with her, he responds to some overwhelming quality in her by a kind of animal tropism. He does not know why, but the sound of her voice fascinates him. His first impulse, to kill her because she had overheard him grieving, is overtaken by the stronger and mystifying impulse of attraction. His second encounter with her at the royal court, when he is a prince, shows him as bestial and rapacious, blinded by lust. But in their third encounter, he becomes self-defining and deliberating□a man, not a beast□when he triumphs over himself and, choosing to champion her honor rather than gratify his own lust, turns his head away from her so that he cannot look at her. By this action, he shows that he will not be guided by perception but by will. Recognizing her and his obligation to her, Segismundo also recognizes the force of Justice and, in doing so, brings into an unstable and uncertain world an absolute principle that cannot be undermined by the alterations that attend being alive. It is steady in the face of them, because of the free ability people have to will the good, which is eternal, by their actions.

Source: Neil Heims, Critical Essay on *Life Is a Dream*, in *Drama for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2006.

Quotes

"Act One

"*On one side, mountain crags; on the other, a tower with SEGISMUNDO'S cell at the base. The door facing the audience, is half open. The action begins at dusk.*

"*Enter ROSAURA, dressed as a man, at the top of a crag and descends to level ground; CLARNN enters behind her.*

"Rosaura. Where have you thrown me, mad horse,

"half griffin? You rage like a storm,

"then flicker like lightning

"outspeeding light, off in a flash

"like a fish without scales,

"or a white featherless bird

"in headlong flight. Beast, there's not

"one natural instinct in you—

"tearing your mouth to hurl

"and drag yourself through

"this labyrinth of tangled rocks!

"So stick to these heights like

"that fallen sun-driver Phalthon,

"and be a hero to all

"the wild animals, while I,

"desperate and blind, scramble down

"these rugged, twisting, barren crags

"where there is no way but what the laws

"of destiny set down for me,

"here where the wrinkled cliffs

"glower at the sun. Poland,

"you greet this stranger harshly,

"writing her entry in blood

"on your sands; she hardly arrives

"before hardship arrives.

"Look where I am—doesn't this prove it?

"But when was pity ever showered

"on anyone in misery?" (Act 1, p. 293)

"*Astolfo*. Drums and trumpets, birds and fountains—

"each responds with its own fanfare

"to your bright rays that once were comets,

"and when joining in the same refrain

"of marveling together

"at your celestial beauty,

"some are feathery clarinets,

"others, metallic birds.

"Thus, all alike salute you, madame:

"to cannonade, you are the queen,

"to birds, their own Aurora,

"to trumpets, their Minerva,

"and to flowers, Flora.

"Because your coming pales the daylight

"which has banished night away,

"yours is the glory of Aurora,

"the peace of sweet Flora,

"Minerva's martial stance,

"who reign as queen of all my heart." (Act 1, p. 303)

"*Clotaldo*. Telling me would only win me

"further; it also would remove

"the possibility of my

"giving aid to your enemy.

" [*aside*] Oh, if I only knew who he is!

"*Rosaura*. Then, not to have you think I value

"your confidence so little,

"know that my adversary is

"no less a personage than

"Astolfo, Duke of Muscovy!

"*Clotaldo*. [*aside*] That could hardly be more painful.

"The case is worse than I suspected.

"Let us see what lies behind it.

"[*aloud*] If you were born a Muscovite,

"the man who's ruler of your country

"could not possibly dishonor you.

"Go back to your country and give up

"this burning purpose that inflames you.

"*Rosaura*. Though he was my Prince, I know

"he could and did dishonor me.

"*Clotaldo*. But he couldn't; even if

"he'd slapped your face, that wouldn't be

"an insult. [*aside*]

"God, what next?

"*Rosaura*. It was

"much worse than that.

"*Clotaldo*. Tell me,

"since you cannot tell me more

"than I already have imagined.

"*Rosaura*. Yes, I'll tell you—though I cannot say

"why I regard you with such respect,

"or why I venerate you so,

"or why I hang upon your words

"so that I hardly dare to tell you

"these outer garments are deceptive,

"and do not belong to me.

"Consider this my enigma

"carefully: if I'm not the person

"I appear to be, and he came here

"with the view of marrying

"Estrella, he could dishonor me.

"There, I have said enough.

"[*Exeunt ROSAURA and CLARNN*]

"*Clotaldo*. Listen! Wait! Stop! What sort of maze

"is this now, where reason finds no clue?

"It is my honor that's at stake.

"The enemy is powerful.

"I'm only a subject, and she—

"she's but a woman. Heavens above,

"show me the way to go.

"There may be none, I know,

"since all I see through this abyss

"is one portentous sky

"covering the whole wide world." (Act 1, pp. 312-313)

"...We need not question, Sire,

"if such a thing is possible.

"Experience shows it often,

"and we know that medicine

"is full of nature's secrets.

"There's no animal, plant, or stone

"without its own determined structure,

"and since human malice can

"uncover a thousand fatal drugs,

"is it any wonder that,

"when their virulence is tempered,

"such drugs, instead of killing,

"are mere sleep-inducing?

"We can drop the question, then,

"since reason and evidence both

"prove the matter creditable..." (Act 2 p. 313)

"*Segismundo*. Heavenly God, what is this?

"What's this I see, Gold help me?

"My wonder makes me fear it less

"than my belief, which doubts it more.

"I, in this sumptuous palace?

"I, in silks and in broaches?

"I, surrounded by swarms of servants,

"all so elegant and attentive?

"I, awake from sleep and in a bed

"of such magnificence?

"I, among so many people

"and all eager to dress me?

"To say I'm dreaming would be untrue

"I know quite well that I'm awake.

"I'm Segismundo, am I not?

"Heavens, tell me if I'm mistaken,

"and tell me what happened to my brain

"and my imagination

"while I slept that I should

"find myself in such a place?

"But be that as it may,

"why worry over such questions?

"Let them all serve me, come what will." (Act 2, pp. 317-318)

"*Enter ASTOLFO with the portrait.*

"*Astolfo*. Here, madame, is the portrait.

"But... oh God!

"*Rosaura*. What's so astonishing,

"Your Grace? What stops you?

"*Astolfo*. Hearing you, Rosaura,

"and seeing you.

"*Rosaura*. I, Rosaura?

"Your Grace must be mistaken, thinking

"I'm some other lady. No, I'm

"Astrea; in all humility,

"I do not merit such extreme

"regard as your surprise reveals.

"*Astolfo*. Rosaura, stop pretending,

"One's heart can never lie;

"although I see you as Astrea,

"I love you as Rosaura." (Act 2, p. 333)

"*Clotaldo*. ...[*to Segismundo*] So much talk

"about eagles put you to sleep

"and made you dream of empire. Still

"it would be better, Segismundo,

"if you could dream, instead,

"of honoring the one

"who took such pains to bring you up;

"for even in a dream, remember,

"it's still worth doing what is right.

"*Segismundo*. True enough. And so, put down

"the beast in us, to avidity

"and mad ambition, since we may

"just happen to dream again,

"as we surely will, for the world

"we live in is so curious

"that to live is but to dream.

"And all that's happened to me tells me

"that while he lives man dreams

"what he is until he wakens.

"The King dreams he's a king,

"and so he lives with this illusion,

"making rules, putting things in order,

"governing, while all the praise

"he's showered with is only lent him,

"written on the wind, and by death,

"his everlasting sorrow,

"transformed to dust and ashes.

"Who would ever dare to reign,

"knowing he must wake into

"the dream of death? The rich man

"dreams he's wealthy with all the cares

"it brings him. The poor man dreams

"he's suffering, his misery

"and poverty. The fellow

"who improves his lot is dreaming,

"and the man who toils and only

"hopes to, is dreaming too.

"And dreaming too, the man

"who injures and offends.

"And so, in this world, finally,

"each man dreams the thing he is,

"though no one sees it so.

"I dream that I am here

"manacled in this cell,

"and I dreamed I saw myself

"better, much better off.

"What is life? A frenzy.

"What is life? An illusion,

"fiction, passing shadow,

"and the greatest good the merest dot,

"for all of life's a dream, and dreams

"themselves are only part of dreaming." (Act 2, pp. 339-340)

"*Enter CLOTALDO*

"*Clotaldo*. Good Lord, what's all this uproar?

"*Segismundo*. Clotaldo. My Lord...

"*Clotaldo*. [*aside*] He's sure

"to take his fury out on me!

"*Clarnn*. [*aside*] I'll bet he throws him off the cliff.

"*Clotaldo*. I come to lie down at your feet, Sire,

"knowing I must die.

"*Segismundo*. Get up,

"little father, get up from the ground,

"for you're to be my guide,

"my true North Star. I entrust you

"with my first efforts, aware of

"how much I owe to your loyalty

"for bringing me up. Come, embrace me.

"*Clotaldo*. What's that you say?

"*Segismundo*. That I'm dreaming,

"and 'Even in a dream, remember,

"it's still worth doing what is right.'

"*Clotaldo*. Indeed, Sire, if doing right

"is to be your motto, then surely

"it should not offend you if the plea

"I make now is in the same cause.

"Wage war against your father?

"I must tell you that I cannot serve

"against my King, thus cannot help you.

"I am at your feet. Kill me!

"*Segismundo*. [*aside*] Traitor! Villain! Ingrate!

"God knows, I should control myself,

"I don't even know if I'm awake.

"[*aloud*] Clotaldo, your courage

"is enviable, thank you.

"Go now and serve the King;

"we'll meet again in combat.

"You, there! Strike the call to arms!

"*Clotaldo*. You have my deepest gratitude.

"*[Exit]*" (Act 3, p. 345)

"*Rosaura*. I'm sure I needn't tell a man

"of honor that when it's nobler

"to give, it's sheer abjection

"to receive. Assuming that much, then,

"you owe him nothing, for if

"he's the one who gave you life,

"as you once gave me mine, it's clear

"he's forcing you, in good conscience,

"to do a thing that's mean and base, and

"I, a thing that's fine and generous.

"By that token, he insults you,

"and by it you remain obliged to me

"for having given me

"what you received from him.

"Therefore, as giving is worthier

"than taking, you must apply yourself

"to the mending of my honor,

"a cause far worthier than his." (Act 3, p. 349)

"*Clotaldo*. Then what do you intend to do?

"*Rosaura*. Kill the Duke.

"*Clotaldo*. Woman

"who has never know her father,

"and so courageous?

"*Rosaura*. Yes.

"*Clotaldo*. What inspires you?

"*Rosaura*. My good name.

"*Clotaldo*. Think of Astolfo as...

"*Rosaura*. The man who utterly disgraced me.

"*Clotaldo*. ...your King and Estrella's husband.

"*Rosaura*. That, by God, he'll never be!

"*Clotaldo*. This is madness!

"*Rosaura*. I know it is.

"*Clotaldo*. Well, control it.

"*Rosaura*. I can't.

"*Clotaldo*. Then you'll lose...

"*Rosaura*. Yes, I know.

"*Clotaldo*. ...your life and honor.

"*Rosaura*. Yes, of course.

"*Clotaldo*. Why? What do you want?

"*Rosaura*. To die.

"*Clotaldo*. That's sheer spite.

"*Rosaura*. No, it's honor.

"*Clotaldo*. It's hysteria.

"*Rosaura*. It's self-respect.

"*Clotaldo*. You're in a frenzy.

"*Rosaura*. Angry, outraged!

"*Clotaldo*. So there's no way to curb

"your blind passion?

"*Rosaura*. No, there's not.

"*Clotaldo*. Who's to help you?

"*Rosaura*. Myself.

"*Clotaldo*. And no other way?

"*Rosaura*. No other way." (Act 3, pp. 350-351)

"*Rosaura*. But, Sire, is this the way you'd leave me?

"Without a single word?

"Doesn't my plight affect you?

"Doesn't my anguish move you?

"Sire, how is this possible—

"you neither listen nor glance at me.

"Won't you even turn and look at me?

"*Segismundo*. Because your honor hangs by a thread,

"Rosaura, I must be cruel now

"in order to be kind.

"Words fail me in reply

"so my honor will not fail.

"I do not dare to talk to you,

"because my deeds must do the talking.

"I do not even look at you because,

"as someone sworn to look after

"your honor, I have all I can do

"to keep from looking at your beauty.

"*[Exits with the SOLDIERS*" (Act 3, p. 358)

"*Clotaldo*. What have you in mind?

"*Basilio*. To do something, Clotaldo,

"that has long needed doing.

"[*to SEGISMUNDO*] If you've come to find me, Prince,

"here I am now, at our feet.

"[*He kneels.*] Here's a snowy carpet for you,

"made out of my white hair.

"Here's my neck—stamp on it!

"Here's my crown—trample on it!

"Smash my honor, disgrace me,

"drag down my self-respect.

"Make sure you take revenge on me.

"Chain and use me as your slave!

"After all I've done to ward it off,

"let fate receive its due, and the word

"of heaven be fulfilled at last." (Act 3, p. 361)

"*Segismundo*. What are you surprised? What's there

"to wonder at, if my master in this

"was a dream, and I still tremble

"at the thought that I may waken

"and find myself again locked in a cell?

"Even if this should not happen,

"it would be enough to dream it,

"since that's the way I've come to know

"that all of human happiness

"must like a dream come to an end.

"And now, to take advantage

"of the moments that remain, I'd like

"to ask your pardon for our mistakes;

"for such noble hearts as yours,

"it would be fitting to forgive them." (Act 3, p. 364)

Topics for Further Study

Although dreams are generally thought not to be real in themselves, they have often had the power to transform reality. Choose two works from the following list and write an essay discussing the way in which dreams recounted in those works transform the course of reality when they are heeded or fail to do so when they are unheeded: the Joseph story in the book of Genesis, Chaucer's poem *The Book of the Duchess*, Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar*, Charles Dickens's novel *A Christmas Carol*, or the original 1962 version of the film *The Manchurian Candidate*, directed by John Frankenheimer.

The poet William Wordsworth wrote that □the Child is father of the Man.□ Compose a dialogue between King Basilio and his son, Segismundo, in which they argue about the truth of Wordsworth's observation.

Read Lope de Vega's play *Fuente ovejuna* (*The Sheep Well*) and write an essay comparing and contrasting it with *Life Is a Dream*.

Write a short story in which a dream plays a significant role in determining the attitude of at least one of the characters in the story.

Keep a bedside journal in which you record all your dreams every day for a week. At the end of the week, write an analysis of your dreams, describing the themes, imagery, characters, settings, plots, sensations, and anything else you think is noteworthy about your dreams.

Research the way plays were staged in Spain and in England in the late 1500s and early 1600s and write an essay in which you show the similarities and differences.

Compare and Contrast

1600s: People often consult the stars to help them decide how to act and to see into the future.

Today: Many people still consult professional astrologers or look up their horoscopes in the newspaper to find out about their love lives or to determine favorable times to travel or make business deals.

1600s: Scientific discoveries and geographical exploration challenge accepted beliefs about religion, nature, the cosmos, and reality.

Today: Technological advances in computing, virtual reality, and genetic engineering are challenging traditional values and ideas.

1600s: Gender identity is clearly signified by the clothing that members of each sex wear.

Today: Male and female fashions often overlap, although women are far more likely than men to wear attire traditionally identified with the opposite gender.

1600s: In Spain, the books people read and the plays they see must be approved by ecclesiastical authorities. Failure to comply with the dictates of the Church is punished by the Inquisition, the judicial body the Catholic Church has established in Spain to enforce its doctrines.

Today: After years of political tyranny and censorship under the government of General Francisco Franco (1892-1975), Spain is a democratic country, where freedom of thought, freedom of speech, and the unfettered right to publish and read are respected.

What Do I Read Next?

□Abu Hassan; or, The Sleeper Awakened,□ in *The Arabian Nights* (ca. 1000 c.e.), is the tale of a wise young man who exhausts half his inheritance on ungrateful friends and then befriends the caliph Haroon al Rashid, who is disguised as a merchant. The caliph drugs Abu Hassan and has him conveyed to the palace and made to believe that he is the caliph. When he is returned to his own home, Abu Hassan's friends think that he has become a madman, and he becomes entirely confused about what is real and what is not. The story is an obvious precursor to *Life Is a Dream*.

Oedipus Rex (ca. 425 b.c.e.), the first play in Sophocles' Theban trilogy□*Oedipus Rex*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, and *Antigone*□tells the story of a man who, as an infant, survives exposure on a mountainside. His parents place him there after hearing a prophecy that when he grows up, he will kill his father and wed his mother.

In *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (1486), Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494) defines the human being as a creature able to ascend to the heights of heaven in nobility of character or descend to the baseness of beasts in behavior.

Mark Twain's novel *The Prince and the Pauper* (1881) tells the story of two boys in England, one the Prince of Wales and the other a slum child, who exchange identities.

□Rapunzel,□ one of the folktales collected by the brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm between 1812 and 1815, tells the story of a girl kept imprisoned in a tower from birth who discovers her true identity and marries her true love only after overcoming a series of dangers.

Shakespeare's early comedy *The Taming of the Shrew* (ca. 1593) begins with a scene in which an impoverished drunkard, Christopher Sly, is taken by a nobleman to his house while he is in a stupor, treated like a lord, and told he has suffered from an illness that has made him believe that he was a poor drunkard. The main action of the play is concerned with the difficulty sometimes involved in separating what is real from pretense and with the power of supposing.

Theodore Dreiser's 1925 novel *An American Tragedy* recounts the story of a young man brought up in oppressive conditions and longing for escape from such a life. He reacts violently when his dreamlike illusions and the real world conflict.

Further Study

Cascardi, Anthony J., *The Limits of Illusion: A Critical Study of Calderón*, Cambridge University Press, 1984.

Cascardi studies Calderón's work with regard to the literary and philosophical currents of his time and probes his treatment of illusion and skepticism in all his plays.

Freud, Sigmund, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, edited and translated by James Strachey, Avon Books, 1980.

Freud's dream book, first published in 1900, is one of the most important and influential books of the twentieth century. In it, Freud advances the theory that dreams are essentially wishes that are represented in a mystifying manner in order to evade the censorship of internalized social constraints.

Fulton, J. Michael, "In Defense of Clotaldo: Reconsidering the Secondary Plot in Calderón's *La vida es sueño*," in *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*, Vol. 56, No. 1, Spring 2002, pp. 11-23.

Citing the body of criticism that brands Rosaura's father as cowardly, deceptive, and self-serving, Fulton argues that, by contrast with Basilio, Segismundo's father, Clotaldo represents the type of an honorable and loyal father.

Hofmannsthal, Hugo von, *Der Turm*, translated by Michael Hamburger, in *Hugo von Hofmannsthal: Poems and Verse Plays*, Bollingen Foundation, 1961.

The Tower is a German adaptation of *La vida es sueño*. Published in 1925 and first performed in 1927, it reflects the chaotic situation of Germany at the time of its composition. Sigismund is freed from his tower prison at the age of twenty-one, defeated in his rebellion against his father, and sentenced to death. On the day of his execution, however, the nobility overthrows Basilius and makes Sigismund king, but he is assassinated during a peasant uprising.

Honig, Edward, "The Magnanimous Prince and the Price of Consciousness: *Life Is a Dream*," in *Calderón and the Seizure of Honor*, Harvard University Press, 1972.

Honig studies the nature of the relationship between Segismundo and Rosaura in *Life Is a Dream*, not only discussing their common concerns with seeking vengeance and gaining honor but also regarding precursor figures in some of Calderón's earlier plays.

Parker, Alexander A., *The Mind and Art of Calderón: Essays on the Comedias*, Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Parker's volume is a survey and a study of Calderón's secular dramas, concentrating on how social and political life as well as myths are reflected in those works. In his

discussion of *Life Is a Dream*, Parker considers the father-son conflict, the meaning of the tower, the power of horoscopes, and the conflict between fate and responsibility.

Strother, Darci L., *Family Matters: A Study of On- and Off-Stage Marriage and Family Relationism in Seventeenth-Century Spain*, Peter Lang Publishing, 1999.

In the context of works by Calderón and other seventeenth-century Spanish playwrights, Strother studies family relations in seventeenth-century Spain and the way the family was presented on the stage. Strother focuses on consensual and arranged marriages, women's roles, child rearing, and alternatives to marriage.

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Calderón de la Barca, Pedro, *Life Is a Dream*, translated by Edward and Elizabeth Huberman, in *The Golden Age*, selected and introduced by Norris Houghton, Dell, 1963, pp. 86-89.

De Armas, Frederick A., *The Return of Astraea: An Astral-Imperial Myth in Calderón*, University Press of Kentucky, 1986, p. 122.

Pico della Mirandola, Giovanni, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, available online at http://cscs.umich.edu/~crshalizi/Mirandola (August 31, 2005).

Sloman, A. E., □The Structure of Calderón's *La vida es sueño*,□ in *Critical Essays on the Theatre of Calderón*, edited by Bruce W. Wardropper, New York University Press, 1965, pp. 90-91.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's"For Students" Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on "classic" novels frequently

studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals— helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man–the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. • Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an “at-a-glance” comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author’s time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes “The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,” a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children’s Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

"Night." Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234–35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the "Criticism" subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on "Winesburg, Ohio." Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335–39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. "Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition," Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9–16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133–36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. "Richard Wright: "Wearing the Mask," in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69–83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59–61.

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