



Calderon: Life's A Dream (Aris & Phillips Hispanic Classics)

Michael Kidd

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"What is life? A frenzy. What is life? An illusion, a shadow, a fiction; and the greatest good is fleeting, for all life is a dream, and even dreams are but dreams." That is the haunting lesson learned by Prince Sigismund in *Life's a Dream* (*La vida es sueño*), the best known and most widely admired play of Catholic Europe's greatest dramatist, Pedro Calderon de la Barca. Calderon's long life (1600-1681) witnessed the pinnacle and collapse of Spanish political power as well as the great flowering of classical Spanish literature. He inherited his dramatic principles from his brilliant predecessor, Lope de Vega, perfecting his formula with more economical plots, greater subtlety of thought, and, in some cases, deeper character development and psychological insight. The English Romantic poet, Percy Bysshe Shelley, one of the first translators of Calderon into English, was of the opinion that he "exceeds all modern dramatists, with the exception of Shakespeare, whom he resembles, however, in the depth of thought and subtlety of imagination of his writings, and in the rare power of interweaving delicate and powerful comic traits with the most tragical situations." Nowhere is Calderon's talent more evident than in *Life's a Dream*, the poignant tale of a prince imprisoned at birth by his astrologer-king father and liberated on the same day a beautiful woman stumbles into his life. The interwoven themes of love, loss, power, and destiny make it the peer of such plays as *Oedipus* and *Hamlet*. With the collaboration of Jonathan Thacker of Merton College, Oxford, Michael Kidd (Augsburg College, Minnesota) offers a British adaptation of his award-winning American prose translation, recipient of the Colorado Endowment for the Humanities Publication Prize in 2004. The volume comes with a generous set of supplementary materials including critical introduction, translator's notes, suggestions for directors, bibliography, and glossary.

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