

Calderón's Clotaldo: Coward or Courtier?  
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Calderón de la Barca's La vida es sueño is one of most widely read plays of the Spanish Golden Age, and many critics have written about its many themes of freedom, illusion versus reality, and the illusory nature of life itself, to name but a few.

I am interested in Clotaldo's role in the play, particularly in his function as jailer and tutor to Segismundo. This character has been the target of many critics' ire because of his complicity with Segismundo's captivity, and also because of how he (mis)handles the situation with his long-lost daughter, Rosaura. In recent years, however, a few critics have come to the character's defense, and a more complete portrayal of Clotaldo is emerging.

I wish to present a more robust depiction of Clotaldo's character by applying courtly ideals found in Baldesar Castiglione's The Courtier. Based on the widely accepted tenets of Castiglione, Clotaldo faithfully renders service as a loyal courtier in some ways, yet there are also points that Castiglione makes about courtly behavior which do indeed impugn Clotaldo's character.

I posit that Clotaldo actually performs his duty (as stated in The Courtier) to instruct and guide Prince Segismundo much better than he has been given credit for, but at the same time falls short in his obligations when dealing with King Basilio. Through the spectrum of The Courtier, I will be able to give a more complete portrayal of Clotaldo's achievement and failures, and in so doing hopefully salvage some of his battered reputation.