



# Writ in the Margins Podcast

Created by the students in REN670: Dramaturgy in the Shakespeare and Performance graduate program at Mary Baldwin University

Produced by Prof. Molly E. Seremet

## Episode Guide

### Season 1, Episode 3

#### *FuenteOvejuna*: What is Love?

Host: Jordan Willis

Special Guests: Thomas Prater, Kara Hankard, Rachel Louis, and Robert Gotschall

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## Episode Resources

Casalduero, Joaquin, and Ruth Whittredge. "Fuenteovejuna": Form and Meaning." *The Tulane Drama Review*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1959, pp. 83–107, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1124864>. Accessed 3 Apr. 2022.

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## Episode Transcript

JORDAN: Love, love, love: good lord, what even *is* love? Despite love being such an integral part of the human experience, there have been thousands of years of debate (that we know of) which have circled around this strange and ephemeral feeling that makes our hearts flutter and puts butterflies in our bellies. Aristotle, one of the most prominent philosophers of the Western world, claimed that “Love is composed of a single soul inhabiting two bodies.” One of the most famous passages about love in the Bible features Christ explaining that “Love is patient, love is kind, it does not envy, it does not boast,” and etc. And perhaps the greatest philosopher of our time, Haddaway, claimed that the ultimate answer to “What is love?” is simply “Baby, don’t hurt me.” Wise words, indeed.

Despite all of these brilliant attempts to encapsulate the meaning of love, there is still no final consensus regarding the exact definition. A child is likely to have a different definition of love from her mother; an elderly widow a different definition from a young soldier. Though love is such a universal experience, love sounds with a different resonance in the heart of every person.

Just as in real life, love is also a hot topic in Lope de Vega’s masterwork play, *Fuenteovejuna*. In this play the characters debate whether love actually exists, what the nature of love is if it exists, and what the signifiers of love are in oneself and in others. De Vega examines the many different kinds of affection and passion that exist in the real world through the fictitious world of his play. In today’s minisode of Writ in the Margins, a podcast created by the Shakespeare & Performance graduate students at Mary Baldwin University, we’re gonna explore how Lope de Vega chose to tackle that age-old question and see what we can learn about love through his works. My name is Jordan Willis, and today we’re about to talk about loooooove~

[banjo pickin’ madness]

If banjos are not the instrument of love, I don’t know what is, haha.

Now before we start delving into Lope de Vega’s *Fuenteovejuna*, let’s take a quick moment to talk about who the heck this guy is and what the heck this play is even about. Lope de Vega was a Spanish playwright, poet, and novelist born in 1562 in the capital city of Madrid. In the world of Spanish literature, de Vega's renown is second only to Miguel de Cervantes, the author of *Don Quixote*. In fact, de Vega wrote such a large corpus of works that Cervantes himself referred to him as "The Phoenix of Wits" and a "Monster of Nature." Basically, the English equivalent of how big of a deal that is is to imagine if Shakespeare referred to a fellow writer with those same terms. *That’s* how big of a deal Lope de Vega is in the world of Spanish literature.

And *Fuenteovejuna* is a heck of a big deal, too. The story of this play is based off of a real, historical event that happened in 1476 in a small town called – you guessed it – Fuenteovejuna. While under the command of the Order of Calatrava, a commander, Fernán Gómez de Guzmán, veilly mistreated the villagers, who then joined together and killed him. When a magistrate sent by King Ferdinand II of Aragon arrived at the village to investigate what

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happened, the villagers, even under the pain of torture, responded only by saying "Fuenteovejuna did it." Lope de Vega then took this historical tale and breathed dramatic life into it, creating a sick villain of the Commander, a complex pair of lovers in Laurencia and Frondoso, the wise natural fool Mengo, and a host of other rich and lively characters.

While this play tackles so many different concepts in brilliant ways – such as the class struggle between the poor agrarian workers and rich noblemen, the concept of “real” Christianity vs. “false” Christianity, the difference between toxic masculinity and wholesome masculinity, and all around women’s rights – our episode today is focusing specifically on love and how it manifests within the story.

I think this exploration of love in *Fuenteovejuna* is a dramaturgically worthy pursuit. One reason is because in this play, Barrido specifically cite Plato’s *Symposium*:

I seem to have some memory of  
 A sermon I heard by and by  
 Regarding Plato, some Greek guy  
 Who taught humanity to love,  
 Although the love he felt was aimed  
 At virtue and his loved one’s soul.

Because De Vega directly alluded to this classic work wherein love is such a hot topic of debate, it seems he was making a conscious connection between the characters in Plato’s work and the characters in his own work. And boy howdy do we dramaturgs love it when authors make direct references to classical works: it gives us something to really sink our teeth into. The ancient Greek language had many different names for “love,” so in honor of this connection with our good buddy Plato, I will be using those terms throughout this podcast.

De Vega contrasts the sexual desire (or eros) the Commander experiences for Laurencia against the virtuous romantic love (or erotas) that Frondoso feels for Laurencia. We see the bantering, playful love (or ludus) the community of Fuenteovejuna has for each other in revelry foiled against the deep, blood-bonding comradery (or philia) the community forms through their collective trauma and need to protect each other. In their article “Fuenteovejuna: Form and Meaning”, Spanish literature scholars Joaquin Casalduero and Ruth Whittredge, offer a description of the main two camps of love that are contrasted with each other. They write: "Natural love, which is egotistic because it wishes only to satisfy its own desires, is opposed to Platonic love, the love which adores the virtue in the beloved" (88). In light of this, we’re going to explore the conversations about love characters share with each other, the actual love bonds that are foiled against one another within the structure of the play, and the questions and assertions the playwright makes about love on a large scale throughout the text.

The first scene in which we meet the citizens of Fuenteovejuna features the younger characters arguing over the nature of love. The action begins with Laurencia and her friend Pascuala disdaining the actions of the Commander,

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a man who has a long history in the village of preying upon young women and wooing them only for his lust's sake. Laurencia describes how the Commander's servant attempted to ply her heart with "A jerkin and a choker that / Their master had assumed I'd crave", and that they began "[...] regaling me / With vows his lovelorn heart declared" (203-206). Though gift-giving and honeyed words are traditionally appropriate means of courting, the women determine that these offerings are not given from the place of romantic love, but instead from sexual desire. They then conclude based on the Commander's actions that all men ultimately only want women to satisfy their lust, and that there is no "true" love within men. Pascuala claims:

As long  
 As they desire us, we're their soul,  
 Their heart, their everything, their whole  
 Life's being, and can do no wrong,  
 But once the fire of passion's spent,  
 They treat us worse than Jews  
 And what were once seductive coos  
 Now chastise us for our consent. (265-272)

Thus Lope de Vega has introduced the readers and audiences to the first form of love he interrogates throughout the play: sexual love, or "eros". Laurencia and Pascuala believe that men merely spend their passions on women until their lusts are satisfied, and then are quick to discredit the women who give into their desires. The Commander is the embodiment of this form of love, and the women believe that his desires reflect what lies within the hearts of all men. De Vega then introduces a new argument and definition of love as Mengo, Barrildo, and Frondoso enter.

Mengo asserts that all love in the world is not divine, pure, or romantic, but is instead mere self interest, or "philautia". He claims that in the same way that his arm will react to shield his face from a punch, or his feet will run when his body is in danger, people only act out of love to get things that they want (383-399). Pascuala rebukes Mengo's assertion as being "not true" and asks: "[...] isn't there a vital need / A man experiences when / He loves a woman, or a brute / Its mate?" (403-407). Pascuala and Mengo then collectively define love to be "a desire for beauty", and that love pursues beauty "for pleasure" (409-412); therefore, Mengo argues, there "Can be no love but of the kind / That everybody seeks to find / By courting pleasure everywhere" (418-420). In this way, Mengo seems to be correlating philautia with the eros that Laurencia and Pascuala were decrying in the Commander: though Pascuala originally believes that Mengo's definition of love is untrue, their definition of love as "the desire and pursuit of beauty aligns" with how the two women described the Commander's – and all men's – affections. After expounding upon these lesser forms of love, Lope de Vega then introduces Frondoso's erotas as the foil to eros and philautia.

In the final scene of Act 1, Laurencia spurns Frondoso's affections for her. He swears that his love for her is sincere, and asks of her: "For if you know my sole desire / Is that we marry, why repay / These good intentions with such scorn?" (755-758). Laurencia has already expressed her deep distrust of men, however, and seems to believe that

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Fronoso's courting masks the same lustful intentions as the Commander's. When the Commander attempts to rape Laurencia later in this scene, however, Fronoso swoops in to confront the noble and defend Laurencia's honor. With this action, Fronoso has now foiled the two arguments of love de Vega established so far: he has opposed the sexual eros of the Commander, and he has also proven Mengo's contention that the only love which exists – the self-love of *philautia* – to be false. Fronoso's defense of Laurencia proves that he values her life over his own, which shows that the depths of his love must run deeper than a mere desire for her body; since he has risked his life to save her, this also means that the heights of his love must fly higher than his love of self. Fronoso's act of honorable selflessness shows the characteristics of true *erotas*.

Fronoso's actions sway Laurencia's heart and instill that same quality of *erotas* in her. In Act II she describes to Pascuala and Mengo how her emotions have shifted from deep mistrust to genuine love:

You know how much I've hated men  
 But, Mengo, I confess since then  
 I've realized he's not like the rest.  
 How valiant Fronoso was!  
 I fear this bravery might mean  
 His death. [...] I love the man. (1154-1158; 1161)

Both lovers, Fronoso and Laurencia, have now become a collective foil to the eros of the Commander. They have created a bond deeper than mere physical attraction for one another: they instead feel a deep appreciation for each other's internal beauty. This love continues to develop and culminates in their marriage. The event is ruined when the commander enters to impose his lustful desires on Laurencia. This singular moment is perhaps the clearest demonstration of the pure *erotas* of the lovers contrasting the lustful eros of the Commander.

The opposition between the Commander's eros and the wholesome *erotas* that Laurencia and Fronoso share for one another galvanizes the community to deepen their own love. Earlier in the play we see the bantering, playful love (or *ludus*) the community of Fuenteovejuna as they make bets over the meaning of love and drink and sign together. Once the Commander ruins the wedding, arrests Fronoso, defiles Jacquita, and beats Laurencia during an attempted rape, the community forms a deep, blood-bonding comradery (or *philia*) through their collective trauma and need to protect each other. This communal love becomes so strong that the entire town of Fuenteovejuna rises up to murder the Commander and his men. Even more telling, after this occurs and the citizens are being interrogated and tortured, no one will give up the names of who incited the uprising: they merely respond that "Fuenteovejuna did it." Thus de Vega once again foils two forms of love: he demonstrates how the lighter love between community can be transformed into such a state where the citizens, even under the threat of torture and death, are willing to risk their wellbeing for one another.

So, what is love? Well, as Lope de Vega shows us, it can be many things. It can be friendship turned to heartfelt romance; it can be a sense of self preservation and caring for oneself; it can be a community reveling and singing

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together, or it can be that same community protecting each other even through violence. Technically, using the ancient Greeks' different definitions of love, we do see eros through the Commander – and de Vega undauntedly explores the emotions behind eros as a way to contrast the purer love between Laurencica and Frondoso. In all, de Vega painted an intricate and complicated story as a playground to explore the different types of affection that individuals and collectives feel for one another.

There are so many ways this dramaturgical analysis can help in the rehearsal process, too. By exploring the various conflicts and shifts of love in this play, directors will be able to more easily delineate beat shifts and character arcs throughout the show. Actors, too, will be able to use this knowledge to explore the dynamics their characters have with the other characters in the show. For example, the actor playing Laurencica will have clearer language to define how the character feels towards Frondoso before and after he rescues her. The actors as a collective will also have the ability to delve into the complexities of how the citizens of Fuenteovejuna interact with each other before the Commander ravages their town and afterwards. This clarification of love in the rehearsal room will help the actors develop more realistic connections, and then tell a clearer story onstage. Sure, the audiences may not think to themselves, “Oh yes, the ludus of the general community has now shifted into *philia*” – but if the directors and actors work together to create playable choices based on that knowledge, the audience will understand that the energy has shifted and that their bonds have deepened.

And again, there's *so much more* to this play besides this: there is still so much to explore inside of this play. If you'd like to hear more from “Writ in the Margins”, check out our two other episodes about *Fuenteovejuna* hosted by the dream teams of Keith Taylor and Cole Metz, and Kelsey Harrison and Kailey Potter. And if you haven't read this play, I couldn't recommend it highly enough.

Well folks, that's all for today's minisode. Thank you so much for your time, and I hope you have a “love”ly day. (Get it? Get it? Because we just... we just spent a whole episode talking about love? And it's lovely? ... Okay, I'm done.) See ya, folks!

[more banjo pickin' madness]

Thank you to my dear friends Thomas Prater, Kara Hankard, Rachel Louis, and Robert Gotschall for lending their voice talents to this podcast. Thomas was Barrildo, Kara was Pascuala, Rachel was Laurencica, and Robert was Mengo and Frondoso. Thank you, too, to Chris Johnston for teaching me how to not suck at banjo. And finally, I would like to thank Molly Seremet for her stellar dramaturgy class and for introducing me to this incredible play

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